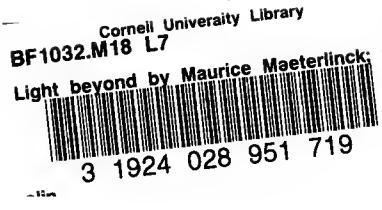
The Light Beyond



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THE LIGHT BEYOND

THE WORKS OF MAURICE MAETERLINCK

ESSAYS

The Treasure of the Humble
Wisdom and Destiny
The Life of the Bee
The Buried Temple
The Double Garden
The Measure of the Hours
On Emerson, and Other Essays
Our Eternity
The Unknown Guest
The Wrack of the Storm

PLAYS

Sister Beatrice, and Ardiane and Barbe Bleue
Joyzelle, and Monna Vanna
The Blue Bird, A Fairy Play
Mary Magdalene
Pélléas and Mélisande, and Other Plays
Princess Maleine
The Intruder, and Other Plays
Aglavaine and Selysette
Poems

HOLIDAY EDITIONS

Our Friend the Dog
The Swarm
The Intelligence of the Flowers
Death
Thoughts from Maeterlinck
The Blue Bird
The Life of the Bee
News of Spring and Other Nature Studies
The Light Beyond

The Light Beyond

By

Maurice Maeterlinck

Translated by

Alexander Teixeira de Mattos



New York
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1917

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INTRODUCTION

IN the first act of *The Blue Bird,* the fairy Bérylune send Mytyl and Tyltyl in search of happiness. Shepherded and protected by Light, they explore the Past and the Future, the Palace of Night, the Kingdoms of the Dead and of the Unborn. At one moment they find themselves in a graveyard; and Mytyl grows fearful at her first contact with the great mystery of Death. Yet the graveyard with its wooden crosses and grass-covered mounds is moonlit and tranquil; and of a sudden, as the revealing diamond is turned in Tyltyl's fingers, even the tombstones and 'all the grand investiture of death' disappear, to be replaced by luxuriant, swaying clusters of Madonna lilies.

"Where are the dead?" asks Mytyl, in amazement, searching in the grass for traces of even one tombstone.

Her brother also looks:

"There are no dead," is his reply.

Any one who was present on the first night of the play at the Haymarket Theatre, in 1909, will

not easily forget the audience's little gasp of delighted surprise. Yet the two lines of dialogue were more than a stage effect, more than an aspect of mysticism; almost they may be regarded as the essence of Maeterlinck's later work. Since the *Life of the Bee,* since the earlier essays and such pure drama as *Monna Vanna, The Blind* and *Pelléas and Mélisande,* his mind seems to have been brooding more and more on the part which Death, the great twin mystery of the world, plays in the life of man and of the race. In *The Death of Tintagiles* there is a barred and studded door, through which, for all its studs and bars, there steals a miasma of dread. And, when the door opens, it is to release a spirit of annihilation which the concerted efforts of Tintagiles' sisters can neither restrain nor force back.

In *The Blue Bird* we are shown that a man cannot die so long as he dwells in the memory of those who loved him. In his latest work Maeterlinck gives to the dead an objective existence. In part each generation survives its own death and transmits to its successors the heritage of aspiration and achievement, of knowledge and passion, which it has received from its predecessors; in greater part the objective existence is founded on new modes of

communication, a new study of psychic relationship and a new belief in a subliminal state.

I have collected in the present volume a selection of essays illustrating the later stages of Maeterlinck's quest. Never in history have so many women and men, stricken suddenly and without warning, sought so unanimously and painfully to penetrate the veil wherein the world's oldest mystery is shrouded. The finality of death was a challenge flung down and eagerly taken up by all whom the loss of son or brother had taken unawares. To Maeterlinck the war has brought in great part the annihilation of a people, his own people; it has inspired him to a splendour of indignation and pity; but, more gravely and urgently than ever before, it has demanded of him an answer to the question of the Sadducees, who "say there is no resurrection."

Readers wishing to study the complete series of essays from which the sixteen in this volume are taken will find them in the three books entitled, *Our Eternity, The Unknown Guest* and *The Wrack of the Storm,* all of which are issued by the present publishers.

ALEXANDER TEIXEIRA DE MATTOS.

CHELSEA, 9 *April* 1917.

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I

OUR INJUSTICE TO DEATH

I

OUR INJUSTICE TO DEATH

1

IT has been well said:

"Death and death alone is what we must consult about life; and not some vague future or survival, where we shall not be. It is our own end; and everything happens in the interval between death and now. Do not talk to me of those imaginary prolongations which wield over us the childish spell of number; do not talk to me—to me who am to die outright—of societies and peoples! There is no reality, there is no true duration, save that between the cradle and the grave. The rest is mere bombast, show, delusion! They call me a master because of some magic in my speech and thoughts; but I am a frightened child in the presence of death!" [1]

[1] Marie Lenéru, *Les Affranchis,* Act III., sc. iv.

2

That is where we stand. For us, death is the one event that counts in our life and in our universe. It is the point whereat all that escapes our vigilance unites and conspires against our happiness. The more our thoughts struggle to turn away from it the closer do they press around it. The more we dread it, the more dreadful it becomes, for it but thrives upon our fears. He who seeks to forget it has his memory filled with it; he who tries to shun it meets naught else. It clouds everything with its shadow. But though we think of death incessantly, we do so unconsciously, without learning to know death. We compel our attention to turn its back upon it, instead of going to it with uplifted head. All the forces which might avail to face death we exhaust in averting our will from it. We deliver it into the groping hands of instinct and we grant it not one hour of our intelligence. Is it surprising that the idea of death, which should be the most perfect and the most luminous of ideas—being the most persistent and the most inevitable—remains the flimsiest and the only one that is a laggard? How should we know the one power which we never look in the face? How could it have profited by

gleams kindled only to help us escape it? To fathom its abysses, we wait until the most enfeebled, the most disordered moments of our life arrive. We do not begin to think of death until we have no longer the strength, I will not say, to think, but even to breathe. A man returning among us from another century would have difficulty in recognising, in the depths of a present-day soul, the image of his gods, of his duty, of his love or of his universe; but the figure of death, when everything has changed around it and when even that which composes it and upon which it depends has vanished, he would find almost untouched, rough-drawn as it was by our fathers, hundreds, nay, thousands of years ago. Our intelligence, grown so bold and active, has not worked upon this figure, has not, so to speak, retouched it in any way. Though we may no longer believe in the tortures of the damned, all the vital cells of the most sceptical among us are still steeped in the appalling mystery of the Hebrew Sheol, the pagan Hades, or the Christian Hell. Though it may no longer be lighted by very definite flames, the gulf still opens at the end of life, and, if less known, is all the more formidable. And therefore, when the impending hour strikes to which we

dared not raise our eyes, everything fails us at the same time. Those two or three uncertain ideas whereon, without examining them, we had meant to lean give way like rushes beneath the weight of the last minutes. In vain we seek a refuge among reflexions which are illusive or are strange to us and which do not know the roads to our heart. No one awaits us on the last shore where all is unprepared, where naught remains afoot save terror.

3

Bossuet, the great poet of the tomb, says:

"It is not worthy of a Christian"—and I would add, of a man—"to postpone his struggle with death until the moment when it arrives to carry him off."

It were a salutary thing for each of us to work out his idea of death in the light of his days and the strength of his intelligence and stand by it. He would say to death:

"I know not who you are, or I would be your master; but, in days when my eyes saw clearer than to-day, I learnt what you were not: that is enough to prevent you from becoming mine."

He would thus bear, graven on his memory, a

tried image against which the last agony would not prevail and from which the phantom-stricken eyes would draw fresh comfort. Instead of the terrible prayer of the dying, which is the prayer of the depths, he would say his own prayer, that of the peaks of his existence, where would be gathered, like angels of peace, the most lucid, the most rarefied thoughts of his life. Is not that the prayer of prayers? After all, what is a true and worthy prayer, if not the most ardent and disinterested effort to reach and grasp the unknown?

4

"The doctors and the priests," said Napoleon, "have long been making death grievous."

And Bacon wrote:

"Pompa mortis magis terret quam mors ipsa."

Let us, then, learn to look upon death as it is in itself, free from the horrors of matter and stripped of the terrors of the imagination. Let us first get rid of all that goes before and does not belong to it. Thus we impute to it the tortures of the last illness; and that is not just. Illnesses have nothing in common with that which ends them. They form part of life and not of death. We readily forget

the most cruel sufferings that restore us to health; and the first sun of convalescence destroys the most unbearable memories of the chamber of pain. But let death come; and at once we overwhelm it with all the evil done before it. Not a tear but is remembered and used as a reproach, not a cry of pain but becomes a cry of accusation. Death alone bears the weight of the errors of nature or the ignorance of science that have uselessly prolonged torments in whose name we curse death because it puts a term to them.

5

In point of fact, whereas sicknesses belong to nature or to life, the agony, which seems peculiar to death, is wholly in the hands of men. Now what we most dread is the awful struggle at the end and especially the last, terrible second of rupture which we shall perhaps see approaching during long hours of helplessness and which suddenly hurls us, naked, disarmed, abandoned by all and stripped of everything, into an unknown that is the home of the only invincible terrors which the soul of man has ever felt.

It is doubly unjust to impute the torments of that second to death. We shall see presently in what manner a man of to-day, if he would remain faithful to his ideas, should picture to himself the unknown into which death flings us. Let us confine ourselves here to the last struggle. As science progresses, it prolongs the agony which is the most dreadful moment and the sharpest peak of human pain and horror, for the watchers, at least; for very often the consciousness of him whom death has brought to bay is already greatly dulled and perceives no more than the distant murmur of the sufferings which it seems to be enduring. All doctors consider it their first duty to prolong to the uttermost even the cruellest pangs of the most hopeless agony. Who has not, at the bedside of a dying man, twenty times wished and not once dared to throw himself at their feet and implore them to show mercy? They are filled with so great a certainty and the duty which they obey leaves so little room for the least doubt that pity and reason, blinded by tears, curb their revolt and recoil before a law which all recognise and revere as the highest law of man's conscience.

6

One day, this prejudice will strike us as barbarous. Its roots go down to the unacknowledged fears left in the heart by religions that have long since died out in the intelligence of men. That is why the doctors act as though convinced that there is no known torture but is preferable to those awaiting us in the unknown. They seem persuaded that every minute gained amid the most intolerable sufferings is snatched from the incomparably more dreadful sufferings which the mysteries of the hereafter reserve for men; and of two evils, to avoid that which they know to be imaginary, they choose the only real one. Besides, in thus postponing the end of a torture, which, as old Seneca says, is the best part of that torture, they are but yielding to the unanimous error which makes its enclosing circle more iron-bound every day: the prolongation of the agony increasing the horror of death; and the horror of death demanding the prolongation of the agony.

7

The doctors, on their side, say or might say that,

in the present stage of science, two or three cases excepted, there is never a certainty of death. Not to support life to its last limits, even at the cost of insupportable torments, might be murder. Doubtless there is not one chance in a hundred thousand that the patient escape. No matter: if that chance exist which, in the majority of cases, will give but a few days, or, at the utmost, a few months of a life that will not be the real life, but much rather, as the Romans called it, "an extended death," those hundred thousand useless torments will not have been in vain. A single hour snatched from death outweighs a whole existence of tortures.

Here we have, face to face, two values that cannot be compared; and, if we mean to weigh them in the same balance, we must heap the scale which we see with all that remains to us, that is to say, with every imaginable pain, for at the decisive hour this is the only weight which counts and which is heavy enough to raise by a hair's-breadth the other scale that dips into what we do not see and is loaded with the thick darkness of another world.

8

Swollen by so many adventitious horrors, the

horror of death becomes such that, without reasoning, we accept the doctor's reasons. And yet there is one point on which they are beginning to yield and to agree. They are slowly consenting, when there is no hope left, if not to deaden, at least to dull the last agonies. Formerly, none of them would have dared to do so; and, even to-day, many of them hesitate and, like misers, measure out niggardly drops of the clemency and peace which they ought to lavish and which they grudge in their dread of weakening the last resistance, that is to say, the most useless and painful quiverings of reluctant life refusing to give place to on-coming rest.

It is not for me to decide whether their pity might show greater daring. It is enough to state once more that all this has no concern with death. It happens before it and beneath it. It is not the arrival of death but the departure of life that is appalling. It is not death but life that we must act upon. It is not death that attacks life; it is life that wrongfully resists death. Evils hasten from every side at the approach of death, but not at its call; and, though they gather round it, they did not come with it. Do you accuse sleep of the fatigue that oppresses you if you do not yield to it?

All those strugglings, those waitings, those tossings, those tragic cursings are on the side of the slope to which we cling and not on the other side. They are, indeed, accidental and temporary and emanate only from our ignorance. All our knowledge merely helps us to die a more painful death than the animals that know nothing. A day will come when science will turn upon its error and no longer hesitate to shorten our woes. A day will come when it will dare and act with certainty; when life, grown wiser, will depart silently at its hour, knowing that it has reached its term, even as it withdraws silently every evening, knowing that its task is done. Once the doctor and the sick man have learnt what they have to learn, there will be no physical nor metaphysical reason why the advent of death should not be as salutary as that of sleep. Perhaps even, as there will be nothing else to take into consideration, it will be possible to surround death with profounder ecstasies and fairer dreams. In any case and from this day, with death once acquitted of that which goes before, it will be easier to look upon it without fear and to lighten that which comes after.

9

Death, as we usually picture it, has two terrors looming behind it. The first has neither face nor form and permeates the whole region of our mind; the other is more definite, more explicit, but almost as powerful. The latter strikes all our senses. Let us examine it first.

Even as we impute to death all the evils that precede it, so do we add to the dread which it inspires all that happens beyond it, thus doing it the same injustice at its going as at its coming. Is it death that digs our graves and orders us to keep that which is made to disappear? If we cannot think without horror of what befalls the beloved in the grave, is it death or we that placed him there? Because death carries the spirit to some place unknown, shall we reproach it with our bestowal of the body which it leaves with us? Death descends into our midst to change the place of a life or change its form: let us judge it by what it does and not by what we do before it comes and after it is gone. For it is already far away when we begin the frightful work which we try hard to prolong to the very utmost, as though we were persuaded that it is our only security against forgetfulness. I am well

aware that, from any other than the human point of view, this proceeding is very innocent; and that, looked upon from a sufficient height, decomposing flesh is no more repulsive than a fading flower or a crumbling stone. But, when all is said, it offends our senses, shocks our memory, daunts our courage, whereas it would be so easy for us to avoid the foul ordeal. Purified by fire, the remembrance lives enthroned as a beautiful idea; and death is naught but an immortal birth cradled in flames. This has been well understood by the wisest and happiest nations in history. What happens in our graves poisons our thoughts together with our bodies. The figure of death, in the imagination of men, depends before all upon the form of burial; and the funeral rites govern not only the fate of those who depart but also the happiness of those who stay, for they raise in the ultimate background of life the great image upon which men's eyes linger in consolation or despair.

10

There is, therefore, but one terror particular to death: that of the unknown into which it hurls us. In facing it, let us lose no time in putting from our minds all that the positive religions have left there.

Let us remember only that it is not for us to prove that they are not proved, but for them to establish that they are true. Now not one of them brings us a proof before which an honest intelligence can bow. Now would it suffice if that intelligence were able to bow; for man lawfully to believe and thus to limit his endless seeking, the proof would need to be irresistible. The God offered to us by the best and strongest of them has given us our reason to employ loyally and fully, that is to say, to try to attain, before all and in all things, that which appears to be the truth. Can He exact that we should accept, in spite of it, a belief whose doubtfulness, from the human point of view, is not denied by its wisest and most ardent defenders? He only offers us a very uncertain story, which, even if scientifically substantiated, would be merely a beautiful lesson in morality and which is buttressed by prophecies and miracles no less doubtful. Must we here call to mind that Pascal, to defend that creed which was already tottering at a time when it seemed at its zenith, vainly attempted a demonstration the mere aspect of which would be enough to destroy the last remnant of faith in a wavering mind? Better than any other, he knew the stock proofs of the theolo-

gians, for they had been the sole study of the last years of his life. If but one of these proofs could have resisted examination, his genius, one of the three or four most profound and lucid geniuses ever known to mankind, must have given it an irresistible force. But he does not linger over these arguments, whose weakness he feels too well; he pushes them scornfully aside, he glories and, in a manner, rejoices in their futility:

"Who then will blame Christians for not being able to give a reason for their faith, those who profess a religion for which they cannot give a reason? They declare, in presenting it to the world, that it is a foolishness, *stultitiam;* and then you complain that they do not prove it! If they proved it, they would not be keeping their word; it is in being destitute of proofs that they are not destitute of sense."

His solitary argument, the one to which he clings desperately and devotes all the power of his genius, is the very condition of man in the universe, that incomprehensible medley of greatness and wretchedness, for which there is no accounting save by the mystery of the first fall:

"For man is more incomprehensible without that

mystery than the mystery itself is incomprehensible to man."

He is therefore reduced to establishing the truth of the Scriptures by an argument drawn from the very Scriptures in question; and—what is more serious—to explain a wide and great and indisputable mystery by another, small, narrow and crude mystery that rests only upon the legend which it is his business to prove. And, let us observe in passing, it is a fatal thing to replace one mystery by another and lesser mystery. In the hierarchy of the unknown, mankind always ascends from the smaller to the greater. On the other hand, to descend from the greater to the smaller is to relapse into the condition of primitive man, who carries his barbarism to the point of replacing the infinite by a fetish or an amulet. The measure of man's greatness is the greatness of the mysteries which he cultivates or on which he dwells.

To return to Pascal, he feels that everything is crumbling around him; and so, in the collapse of human reason, he at last offers us the monstrous wager that is the supreme avowal of the bankruptcy and despair of his faith. God, he says, meaning his

God and the Christian religion with all its precepts and all its consequences, exists or does not exist. We are unable, by human arguments, to prove that He exists or that He does not exist.

"If there is a God, He is infinitely incomprehensible, because, having neither divisions nor bounds, He has no relation to us. We are therefore incapable of knowing either what He is or if He is."

God is or is not.

"But to which side shall we lean? Reason can determine nothing about it. There is an infinite gulf that separates us. A game is played at the uttermost part of this infinite distance, in which heads may turn up or tails. Which will you wager? There is no reason for betting on either one or the other; you cannot reasonably defend either."

The correct course would be not to wager at all.

"Yes, but you must wager: this is not a matter for your will; you are launched in it."

Not to wager that God exists means wagering that He does not exist, for which He will punish you eternally. What then do you risk by wagering, at all hazards, that He exists? If He does not, you lose a few small pleasures, a few wretched comforts of this life, because your little sacrifice will

not have been rewarded; if He exists, you gain an eternity of unspeakable happiness.

" 'It is true, but, in spite of all, I am so made that I cannot believe.'

"Never mind, follow the way in which they began who believe and who at first did not believe either, taking holy water, having masses said, etc. That in itself will make you believe and will reduce you to the level of the beasts."

" 'But that is just what I am afraid of.'

"Why? What have you to lose?"

Nearly three centuries of apologetics have not added one useful argument to that terrible and despairing page of Pascal. And this is all that human intelligence has found to compel our life. If the God who demands our faith will not have us decide by our reason, by what then must our choice be made? By usage? By the accidents of race or birth, by some æsthetic or sentimental pitch-and-toss? Or has He set within us another higher and surer faculty, before which the understanding must yield? If so, where is it? What is its name? If this God punishes us for not having blindly followed a faith that does not force itself irresistibly upon the intelligence which He gave us; if He

chastises us for not having made, in the presence of the great enigma with which He confronts us, a choice which is rejected by that best and most divine part which He has implanted in us, we have nothing left to reply: we are the dupes of a cruel and incomprehensible sport, we are the victims of a terrible snare and an immense injustice; and, whatever the torments wherewith that injustice may load us, they will be less intolerable than the eternal presence of its Author.

II

ANNIHILATION

II

ANNIHILATION

1

AND now we stand before the abyss. It is void of all the dreams with which our fathers peopled it. They thought that they knew what was there; we know only what is not there. It is the vaster by all that we have learned to know nothing of. While waiting for a scientific certainty to break through its darkness—for man has the right to hope for that which he does not yet conceive—the only point that interests us, because it is situated in the little circle which our actual intelligence traces in the thickest blackness of the night, is to know whether the unknown for which we are bound will be dreadful or not.

Outside the religions, there are four imaginable solutions and no more: total annihilation; survival with our consciousness of to-day; survival without any sort of consciousness; lastly, survival in the

universal consciousness, or with a consciousness different from that which we possess in this world.

2

Total annihilation is impossible. We are the prisoners of an infinity without outlet, wherein nothing perishes, wherein everything is dispersed but nothing lost. Neither a body nor a thought can drop out of the universe, out of time and space. Not an atom of our flesh, not a quiver of our nerves will go where they will cease to be, for there is no place where anything ceases to be. The brightness of a star extinguished millions of years ago still wanders in the ether where our eyes will perhaps behold it this very night, pursuing its endless road. It is the same with all that we see, as with all that we do not see. To be able to do away with a thing, that is to say, to fling it into nothingness, nothingness would have to exist; and, if it exists, under whatever form, it is no longer nothingness. As soon as we try to analyse it, to define it, or to understand it, thought and expressions fail us, or create that which they are struggling to deny. It is as contrary to the nature of our reason and probably of all imaginable reason to conceive nothingness as to

conceive limits to infinity. Nothingness, besides, is but a negative infinity, a sort of infinity of darkness opposed to that which our intelligence strives to illumine, or rather it is but a child-name or nick-name which our mind has bestowed upon that which it has not attempted to embrace, for we call nothingness all that escapes our senses or our reason and exists without our knowledge.

3

But, it will perhaps be said, though the annihilation of every world and every thing be impossible, it is not so certain that their death is impossible; and, to us, what is the difference between nothingness and everlasting death? Here again we are led astray by our imagination and by words. We can no more conceive death than we can conceive nothingness. We use the word death to cover those fragments of nothingness which we believe that we understand; but, on closer examination, we are bound to recognise that our idea of death is much too puerile to contain the least truth. It reaches no higher than our own bodies and cannot measure the destinies of the universe. We give the name of death to anything that has a life a little different

from ours. Even so do we act towards a world that appears to us motionless and frozen, the moon, for instance, because we are persuaded that any form of existence, animal or vegetable, is extinguished upon it for ever. But it is now some years since we learned that the most inert matter, to outward seeming, is animated by movements so powerful and furious that all animal or vegetable life is no more than sleep and immobility by the side of the swirling eddies and immeasurable energy locked up in a wayside stone.

"There is no room for death!" cried Emily Brontë.

But, even if, in the infinite series of the centuries, all matter should really become inert and motionless, it would none the less persist under one form or another; and persistence, though it were in total immobility, would, after all, be but a form of life stable and silent at last. All that dies falls into life; and all that is born is of the same age as that which dies. If death carried us to nothingness, did birth then draw us out of that same nothingness? Why should the second be more impossible than the first? The higher human thought rises and the wider it expands, the less comprehensible do noth-

ingness and death become. In any case—and this is what matters here—if nothingness were possible, since it could not be anything whatever, it could not be dreadful.

III

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE DEAD

III

COMMUNICATIONS WITH THE DEAD

1

THE spiritualists communicate or think that they communicate with the dead by means of what they call automatic speech and writing. These are obtained by the agency of a medium [1] in a state of ecstasy, or rather "trance,"

[1] Those who take up the study of these supernormal manifestations usually ask themselves:

"Why mediums? Why make use of these often questionable and always inadequate intermediaries?"

The reason is that, hitherto, no way has been discovered of doing without them. If we admit the spiritualistic theory, the discarnate spirits which surround us on every side and which are separated from us by the impenetrable and mysterious wall of death seek, in order to communicate with us, the line of least resistance between the two worlds and find it in the medium, without our knowing why, even as we do not know why an electric current passes along copper wire and is stopped by glass or porcelain. If, on the other hand, we admit the telepathic hypothesis, which is the more probable, we observe that the thoughts, intentions or suggestions transmitted are, in the majority of cases, not conveyed from one subconscious intelligence to another. There is need of an organism that is, at the same time, a receiver and a transmitter; and this organism is found in the medium. Why? Once more, we know absolutely nothing about

to employ the vocabulary of the new science. This condition is not one of hypnotic sleep, nor does it seem to be an hysterical manifestation; it is often associated, as in the case of the medium Mrs. Piper, with perfect health and complete intellectual and physical balance. It is rather the more or less voluntary emergence of a second or subliminal personality or consciousness of the medium; or, if we admit the spiritualistic hypothesis, his occupation, his "psychic invasion," as Myers calls it, by forces from another world. In the "entranced" subject, the normal consciousness and personality are entirely done away with; and he replies "automatically," sometimes by word of mouth, more often in writing, to the questions put to him. It has happened that he speaks and writes simultaneously, his voice being occupied by one spirit and his hand by another, who thus carry on two independent conversations. More rarely, the voice and the two

it, even as we do not know why one body or combination of bodies is sensitive to concentric waves in wireless telegraphy, while another is not affected by it. We are here groping, as indeed we grope almost everywhere, in the obscure domain of undisputed but inexplicable facts. Those who care to possess more precise notions on the theory of mediumism will do well to read the admirable address delivered by Sir William Crookes, as president of the S.P.R., on the 29th of January 1897.

hands are "possessed" at one and the same time; and we receive three different communications. Obviously, manifestations of this sort lend themselves to frauds and impostures of all kinds; and the distrust aroused is at first invincible. But there are some that make their appearance encompassed with such guarantees of good faith and sincerity, so often, so long and so rigorously checked by scientific men of unimpeachable character and authority and of originally inflexible scepticism, that it becomes difficult to maintain a suspicion at the finish.[1]

[1] The questions of fraud and imposture are naturally the first that suggest themselves when we begin to study these phenomena. But the slightest acquaintance with the life, habits and proceedings of the three or four leading mediums is enough to remove even the faintest shadow of suspicion. Of all the explanations conceivable, that one which attributes everything to imposture and trickery is unquestionably the most extraordinary and the least probable. Moreover, by reading Richard Hodgson's report entitled, *Observations of certain Phenomena of Trance* (*Proceedings*, Vols. VIII. and XIII.) and also J. H. Hyslop's report (*Proceedings*, Vol. XVI.), we can observe the precautions taken, even to the extent of employing special detectives, to make certain that Mrs. Piper, for instance, was unable, normally and humanly speaking, to have any knowledge of the facts which she revealed. I repeat, from the moment that one enters upon this study, all suspicions are dispelled without leaving a trace behind them; and we are soon convinced that the key to the riddle must not be sought in imposture. All the manifestations of the dumb, mysterious and oppressed personality that lies concealed in every one of us have to undergo the same ordeal in their turn; and those which relate to the divining-rod, to name no others, are at this moment passing through the same crisis of incredulity. Less than fifty years ago, most of the hypnotic phenomena which are now scientifi-

Unfortunately, I am not able to enter here into the details of some of these purely scientific sittings, those for instance of Mrs. Piper, the famous medium with whom F. W. H. Myers, Richard Hodgson, Professor Newbold, of the University of Pennsylvania, Sir Oliver Lodge and William James worked during a number of years. On the other hand, it is precisely the accumulation and coincidences of these abnormal details which gradually produce and confirm the conviction that we are in the presence of an entirely new, improbable but genuine phenomenon, which is sometimes difficult of classification among exclusively terrestrial phenomena. I should have to devote to these "communications" a special study which would exceed the limits of this essay; and I will therefore content myself with referring those who care to know more of the subject to Sir Oliver Lodge's book, *The Survival of Man;* and, above all, to the twenty-five bulky volumes of the *Proceedings* of the S.P.R., notably to the report and comments of William James on the Piper-Hodgson sittings in Vol. XXIII. and to Vol. XIII., where Hodgson ex-

cally classified were likewise looked upon as fraudulent. It seems that man is loth to admit that there lie within him many more things than he imagined.

amines the facts and arguments that may be adduced for or against the agency of the dead; and, lastly, to Myers' great work, *Human Personality and its Survival after Bodily Death.*

2

The "entranced" mediums are invaded or possessed by different familiar spirits to whom the new science gives the somewhat inappropriate and ambiguous name of "controls." Thus, Mrs. Piper is visited in succession by Phinuit, George Pelham, or "G.P.," Imperator, Doctor and Rector. Mrs. Thompson, another very celebrated medium, has Nelly for her usual tenant, while graver and more illustrious personages would take possession of Stainton Moses, a clergyman. Each of these spirits retains a sharply defined character, which is consistent throughout and which, moreover, for the most part bears no relation to that of the medium. Amongst these, Phinuit and Nelly are undoubtedly the most attractive, the most original, the most living, the most active and, above all, the most talkative. They centralise the communications after a fashion; they come and go officiously; and, should any one of those present wish to be brought

into touch with the soul of a deceased relative or friend, they fly in search of it, find it amid the invisible throng, usher it in, announce its presence, speak in its name, transmit and, so to speak, translate the questions and replies; for it seems that it is very difficult for the dead to communicate with the living and that they need special aptitudes and a concurrence of extraordinary circumstances. We will not yet examine what they have to reveal to us; but to see them thus fluttering to and fro amid the multitude of their discarnate brothers and sisters gives us a first impression of the next world which is none too reassuring; and we say to ourselves that the dead of to-day are strangely like those whom Ulysses conjured up out of the Cimmerian darkness three thousand years ago: pale and empty shades, bewildered, incoherent, puerile and terror-stricken, like unto dreams, more numerous than the leaves that fall in autumn and, like them, trembling in the unknown winds from the vast plains of the other world. They no longer even have enough life to be unhappy; and they seem to drag out, we know not where, a precarious and idle existence, to wander aimlessly, to hover round us, slumbering, or chattering among one another of the minor matters of

this world; and, when a gap is made in their darkness, to hasten from all sides, like flocks of famished birds, hungering for light and the sound of a human voice. And, in spite of ourselves, we think of the *Odyssey* and the sinister words of the shade of Achilles as it issued from Erebus:

"Do not, O illustrious Ulysses, speak to me of death; I would wish, being on earth, to serve for hire with another man of no estate, who had not much livelihood, rather than rule over all the departed dead."

3

What have these latterday dead to tell us? To begin with, it is a remarkable thing that they appear to be much more interested in events here below than in those of the world wherein they move. They seem, above all, jealous to establish their identity, to prove that they still exist, that they recognise us, that they know everything; and, to convince us of this, they enter into the most minute and forgotten details with extraordinary precision, perspicacity and prolixity. They are also extremely clever at unravelling the intricate family connections of the person actually questioning them, of

any of the sitters, or even of a stranger entering the room. They recall this one's little infirmities, that one's maladies, the eccentricities or personal tendencies of a third. They have cognisance of events taking place at a distance: they see, for instance, and describe to their hearers in London an insignificant episode in Canada. In a word, they say and do almost all the disconcerting and inexplicable things that are sometimes obtained from a first-rate medium; perhaps they even go a little further; but there comes from it all no breath, no glimmer of the hereafter, not even the something vaguely promised and vaguely waited for.

We shall be told that the mediums are visited only by inferior spirits, incapable of tearing themselves from earthly cares and soaring towards greater and loftier ideas. It is possible; and no doubt we are wrong to believe that a spirit stripped of its body can suddenly be transformed and reach, in a moment, the level of our imaginings; but could they not at least inform us where they are, what they feel and what they do?

4

And now it seems that death itself has elected to

answer these objections. Frederic Myers, Richard Hodgson and William James, who so often, for long and ardent hours, questioned Mrs. Piper and Mrs. Thompson and obliged the departed to speak by their mouths, are now themselves among the shades, on the other side of the curtain of darkness. They at least knew exactly what to do in order to reach us, what to reveal in order to allay the uneasy curiosity of men. Myers in particular, the most ardent, the most convinced, the most impatient of the veil that parted him from the eternal realities, formally promised those who were continuing his work that he would make every imaginable effort out yonder, in the unknown, to come to their aid in a decisive fashion. He kept his word. A month after his death, when Sir Oliver Lodge was questioning Mrs. Thompson in her trance, Nelly, the medium's familiar spirit, suddenly declared that she had seen Myers, that he was not yet fully awake, but that he hoped to come, at nine o'clock in the evening, and "communicate" with his old friend of the Psychical Society.

The sitting was suspended and resumed at half past eight; and Myers' "communication" was at last obtained. He was recognised by the first few

words he spoke; it was really he; he had not changed. Faithful to his idiosyncrasy when on earth, he at once insisted on the necessity for taking notes. But he seemed dazed. They spoke to him of the Society for Psychical Research, the sole interest of his life. He had lost all recollection of it. Then memory gradually revived; and there followed a quantity of post-mortem gossip on the subject of the society's next president, the obituary article in the *Times*, the letters that should be published and so on. He complained that people would not let him rest, that there was not a place in England where they did not ask for him:

"Call Myers! Bring Myers!"

He ought to be given time to collect himself, to reflect. He also complained of the difficulty of conveying his ideas through the mediums: "they were translating like a schoolboy does his first lines of Virgil."[1] As for his present condition, "he groped his way as if through passages, before he knew he was dead. He thought he had lost his way in a strange town . . . and, even when he saw

[1] In this and other "communications," I have quoted the actual English words employed, whenever I have been able to discover them.—*Translator.*

people that he knew were dead, he thought they were only visions."

This, together with more chatter of a no less trivial nature, is about all that we obtained from Myers' "control" or "impersonation," of which better things had been expected. The "communication" and many others which, it appears, recall in a striking fashion Myers' habits, character and ways of thinking and speaking would possess some value if none of those by whom or to whom they were made had been acquainted with him at the time when he was still numbered among the living. As they stand, they are most probably but reminiscences of a secondary personality of the medium or unconscious suggestions of the questioner or the sitters.

5

A more important communication and a more perplexing, because of the names connected with it, is that which is known as "Mrs. Piper's Hodgson-Control." Professor William James devotes an account of over a hundred and twenty pages to it in Vol. XXIII. of the *Proceedings*. Dr. Hodgson, in his lifetime, was secretary of the American

branch of the S.P.R., of which William James was vice-president. For many years, he devoted himself to Mrs. Piper the medium, working with her twice a week and thus accumulating an enormous mass of documents on the subject of posthumous manifestations, a mass whose wealth has not yet been exhausted. Like Myers, he had promised to come back after his death; and, in his jovial way, he had more than once declared to Mrs. Piper that, when he came to visit her in his turn, as he had more experience than the other spirits, the sittings would take a more decisive shape and that "he would make it hot for them." He did come back, a week after his death, and manifested himself by automatic writing (which, with Mrs. Piper as medium, was the most usual method of communication) during several sittings at which William James was present. I should like to give an idea of these manifestations. But, as the celebrated Harvard professor very truly observes, the shorthand report of a sitting of this kind at once alters its aspect from start to finish. We seek in vain for the emotion experienced on thus finding yourself in the presence of an invisible but living being, who not only answers your questions, but anticipates your thoughts, un-

derstands before you have finished speaking, grasps an allusion and caps it with another allusion, grave or smiling. The life of the dead man, which, during a strange hour, had, so to speak, surrounded and penetrated you, seems to be extinguished for the second time. Stenography, which is devoid of all emotion, no doubt supplies the best elements for arriving at a logical conclusion; but it is not certain that here, as in many other cases where the unknown predominates, logic is the only road that leads to the truth.

"When I first undertook," says William James, "to collate this series of sittings and make the present report, I supposed that my verdict would be determined by pure logic. Certain minute incidents, I thought, ought to make for spirit-return or against it in a 'crucial' way. But watching my mind work as it goes over the data, convinces me that exact logic plays only a preparatory part in shaping our conclusions here; and that the decisive vote, if there be one, has to be cast by what I may call one's general sense of dramatic probability, which sense ebbs and flows from one hypothesis to another—it does so in the present writer at least—in a rather illogical manner. If one sticks to the

detail, one may draw an anti-spiritist conclusion; if one thinks more of what the whole mass may signify, one may well incline to spiritist interpretations." [1]

And, at the end of his article, he sums up in the following words:

"*I myself feel as if an external will to communicate were probably there,* that is, I find myself doubting, in consequence of my whole acquaintance with that sphere of phenomena, that Mrs. Piper's dream-life, even equipped with 'telepathic' powers, accounts for all the results found. But if asked whether the will to communicate be Hodgson's, or be some mere spirit-counterfeit of Hodgson, I remain uncertain and await more facts, facts which may not point clearly to a conclusion for fifty or a hundred years." [2]

As we see, William James is inclined to waver; and at certain points in his account he appears to waver still more and indeed to say deliberately that the spirits "have a finger in the pie." These hesitations on the part of a man who has revolutionised our psychological ideas and who possessed a brain

[1] *Proceedings,* Vol. XXIII., p. 33.
[2] *Ibid,* p. 120.

as wonderfully organised and well-balanced as that or our own Taine, for instance, are very significant. As a doctor of medicine and a professor of philosophy, sceptical by nature and scrupulously faithful to experimental methods, he was thrice qualified to conduct investigations of this kind to a successful conclusion. It is not a question of allowing ourselves, in our turn, to be unduly influenced by those hesitations; but, in any case, they show that the problem is a serious one, the gravest, perhaps, if the facts were beyond dispute, which we have had to solve since the coming of Christ; and that we must not expect to dismiss it with a shrug or a laugh.

6

I am obliged, for lack of space, to refer those who wish to form an opinion of their own on the "Piper-Hodgson" case to the text of the *Proceedings*. The case, at the same time, is far from being one of the most striking; it should rather be classed, were it not for the importance of the sitters concerned, among the minor successes of the Piper series. Hodgson, according to the invariable custom of the spirits, is, first of all, bent on making himself recog-

nised; and the inevitable, tedious string of trifling reminiscences begins twenty times over again and fills page after page. As usual in such instances, the recollections common to both the questioner and the spirit who is supposed to be replying are brought out in their most circumstantial, their most insignificant and also their most private details with astonishing eagerness, precision and vivacity. And observe that, for all these details, which he discloses with such extraordinary facility, the dead man answering seeks by preference, one would say, the most hidden and forgotten treasures of the living listener's memory. He spares him nothing; he harps on everything with childish satisfaction and apprehensive solicitude, not so much to persuade others as to prove to himself that he still exists. And the obstinacy of this poor invisible being, in striving to manifest himself through the hitherto uncrannied doors that separate us from our eternal destinies, is at once ridiculous and tragic:

"Do you remember, William, when we were in the country at So-and-so's, that game we played with the children; do you remember my saying such-and-such a thing when I was in that room where there was such-and-such a chair or table?"

"Why, yes, Hodgson, I do remember now."

"A good test, that?"

"First-rate, Hodgson!"

And so on, indefinitely. Sometimes, there is a more significant incident that seems to surpass the mere transmission of subliminal thought. They are talking, for instance, of a frustrated marriage which was always surrounded with great mystery, even to Hodgson's most intimate friends:

"Do you remember a lady-doctor in New York, a member of our society?"

"No, but what about her?"

"Her husband's name was Blair . . . I think."

"Do you mean Dr. Blair Thaw?"

"Oh, yes. Ask Mrs. Thaw if I did not at a dinner-party mention something about the lady. I may have done so."

James writes to Mrs. Thaw, who declares that, as a matter of fact, fifteen years before, Hodgson had said to her that he had just proposed to a girl and been refused. Mrs. Thaw and Dr. Newbold were the only people in the world who knew the particulars.

But to come to the further sittings. Among other points discussed is the financial position of the

American branch of the S.P.R., a position which, at the death of the secretary, or rather factotum, Hodgson, was anything but brilliant. And behold the somewhat strange spectacle of different members of the society debating its affairs with their defunct secretary. Shall they dissolve? Shall they amalgamate? Shall they send the materials collected, most of which are Hodgson's, to England? They consult the dead man; he replies, gives good advice, seems fully aware of all the complications, all the difficulties. One day, in Hodgson's lifetime, when the society was found to be short of funds, an anonymous donor had sent the sum necessary to relieve it from embarrassment. Hodgson alive did not know who the donor was; Hodgson dead picks him out among those present, addresses him by name and thanks him publicly. On another occasion, Hodgson, like all the spirits, complains of the extreme difficulty which he finds in conveying his thought through the alien organism of the medium:

"I find now difficulties such as a blind man would experience in trying to find his hat," he says.

But, when, after so much idle chatter, William James at last puts the essential questions that burn

our lips—"Hodgson, what have you to tell us about the other life?"—the dead man becomes shifty and does nothing but seek evasions:

"It is not a vague fantasy but a reality," he replies.

"But," Mrs. William James insists, "do you live as we do, as men do?"

"What does she say?" asks the spirit, pretending not to understand.

"Do you live as men do?" repeats William James.

"Do you wear clothing and live in houses?" adds his wife.

"Oh yes, houses, but not clothing. No, that is absurd. Just wait a moment, I am going to get out."

"You will come back again?"

"Yes."

"He has got to go out and get his breath," remarks another spirit, named Rector, suddenly intervening.

It has not been waste of time, perhaps, to reproduce the general features of one of these sittings which may be regarded as typical. I will add, in order to give an idea of the farthest point which it is

possible to attain, the following instance of an experiment made by Sir Oliver Lodge and related by him. He handed Mrs. Piper, in her "trance," a gold watch which had just been sent him by one of his uncles and which belonged to that uncle's twin brother, who had died twenty years before. When the watch was in her possession, Mrs. Piper, or rather Phinuit, one of her familiar spirits, began to relate a host of details concerning the childhood of this twin brother, facts dating back for more than sixty-six years and of course unknown to Sir Oliver Lodge. Soon after, the surviving uncle, who lived in another town, wrote and confirmed the accuracy of most of these details, which he had quite forgotten and of which he was only now reminded by the medium's revelations; while those which he could not recollect at all were subsequently declared to be in accordance with fact by a third uncle, an old sea-captain, who lived in Cornwall and who had not the least notion why such strange questions were put to him.

I quote this instance not because it has any exceptional or decisive value, but simply, I repeat, by way of an example; for, like the case connected with Mrs. Thaw, mentioned above, it marks pretty

accurately the extreme points to which people have up to now, thanks to spirit agency, penetrated the mysteries of the unknown. It is well to add that cases in which the supposed limits of the most far-reaching telepathy are so manifestly exceeded are fairly uncommon.

7

Now what are we to think of all this? Must we, with Myers, Newbold, Hyslop, Hodgson and many others, who studied this problem at length, conclude in favour of the incontestable agency of forces and intelligences returning from the farther bank of the great river which it was deemed that none might cross. Must we acknowledge with them that there are cases ever more numerous which make it impossible for us to hesitate any longer between the telepathic theory and the spiritualistic theory? I do not think so. I have no prejudices—what were the use of having any, in these mysteries?—no reluctance to admit the survival and the intervention of the dead; but it is wise and necessary, before leaving the terrestrial plane, to exhaust all the suppositions, all the explanations there to be discovered. We have to make our choice between two manifestations of the unknown, two miracles, if you prefer,

whereof one is situated in the world which we inhabit and the other in a region which, rightly or wrongly, we believe to be separated from us by nameless spaces which no human being, alive or dead, has crossed to this day. It is natural, therefore, that we should stay in our own world, as long as it gives us a foothold, as long as we are not pitilessly expelled from it by a series of irresistible and irrefutable facts issuing from the adjoining abyss. The survival of a spirit is no more improbable than the prodigious faculties which we are obliged to attribute to the mediums if we deny them to the dead; but the existence of the medium, contrary to that of the spirit, is unquestionable; and therefore it is for the spirit, or for those who make use of its name, first to prove that it exists.

Do the extraordinary phenomena of which we know—transmission of thought from one subconscious mind to another, perception of events at a distance, subliminal clairvoyance—occur when the dead are not in evidence, when the experiments are being made exclusively between living persons? This cannot be honestly contested. Certainly no one has ever obtained among living people any series of communications or revelations similar to

those of the great spiritualistic mediums, Mrs. Piper, Mrs. Thompson and Stainton Moses, nor anything that can compare with them for continuity or lucidity. But, though the quality of the phenomena will not bear comparison, it cannot be denied that their inner nature is identical. Our logical inference is that the real cause lies not in the source of inspiration, but in the personal value, the sensitiveness, the power of the medium. For the rest, Mr. J. G. Piddington, who devoted an exceedingly detailed study to Mrs. Thompson, plainly perceived in her, when she was not "entranced" and when there were no spirits whatever in question, manifestations inferior, it is true, but absolutely analogous to those involving the dead.[1] These mediums are pleased, in all good faith and probably unconsciously, to give to their subliminal faculties, to their secondary personalities, or to accept, on their behalf, names which were borne by beings who have crossed to the farther side of the mystery: this is a matter of vocabulary or nomenclature which neither

[1] For a discussion of these cases, which would take us too far from our subject, see Mr. J. G. Piddington's paper, *Phenomena in Mrs. Thompson's Trance* (*Proceedings*, Vol. XVIII., pp. 180 *et seq.*); also Professor A. C. Pigou's article in Vol. XXIII. (*Proceedings*, pp. 286 *et seq.*).

lessens nor increases the intrinsic significance of the facts. Well, in examining these facts, however strange and really unparalleled some of them may be, I never find one which proceeds frankly from this world or which comes indisputably from the other. They are, if you wish, phenomenal border incidents; but it cannot be said that the border has been violated. In the story of Sir Oliver Lodge's watch, for instance, which is one of the most characteristic and one which carries us farther than most, we must attribute to the medium faculties that have ceased to be human. She must have put herself in touch, whether by perception of events at a distance, or by transmission of thought from one subconscious mind to another, or again by subliminal clairvoyance, with the two surviving brothers of the deceased owner of the watch; and, in the past subconsciousness of those two brothers, distant from each other, she had to rediscover a host of circumstances which they themselves had forgotten and which lay hidden beneath the heaped-up dust and darkness of six-and-sixty years. It is certain that a phenomenon of this kind passes the bounds of the imagination and that we should refuse to credit

it if, first of all, the experiment had not been controlled and certified by a man of the standing of Sir Oliver Lodge and if, moreover, it did not form one of a group of equally significant facts which clearly show that we are not here concerned with an absolutely unique miracle or with an unhoped-for and unprecedented concourse of coincidences. It is simply a matter of distant perception, subliminal clairvoyance and telepathy raised to the highest power; and these three manifestations of the unexplored depths of man are to-day recognised and classified by science, which is not saying that they are explained: that is another question. When, in connection with electricity, we use such terms as positive, negative, induction, potential and resistance, we are also applying conventional words to facts and phenomena of whose inward essence we are utterly ignorant; and we must needs be content with these, pending any better. There is, I insist, between these extraordinary manifestations and those given to us by a medium who is not speaking in the name of the dead, but a difference of the greater and the lesser, a difference of extent or degree and in no wise a difference in kind.

8

For the proof to be more decisive, it would be necessary that no one, neither the medium nor the witnesses, should ever have known of the existence of him whose past is revealed by the dead man, in other words, that every living link should be eliminated. I do not believe that this has actually occurred up to the present, nor even that it is possible; in any case, it would be very difficult to control such an experiment. Be this as it may, Dr. Hodgson, who devoted part of his life to the quest of specific phenomena wherein the boundaries of mediumistic power should be plainly overstepped, believes that he found them in certain cases, of which—as the others were of very much the same nature—I will merely mention one of the most striking.[1] In the course of excellent sittings with Mrs. Piper the medium, he communicated with various dead friends who reminded him of a large number of common memories. The medium, the spirits and he himself seemed in a wonderfully accommodating mood; and the revelations were plentiful, exact and easy. In this extremely favourable atmosphere, he was placed in communication with the soul of one of his

[1] *Proceedings,* Vol. XIII., pp. 349-350 and 375.

best friends, who had died a year before and whom he simply calls "A." This A, whom he had known more intimately than most of the spirits with whom he had communicated previously, behaved quite differently and, while establishing his identity beyond dispute, vouchsafed only incoherent replies. Now A "had been troubled much, for years before his death, by headaches and occasional mental exhaustion, though not amounting to positive mental disturbance."

The same phenomenon appears to recur whenever similar troubles have come before death, as in cases of suicide.

"If the telepathic explanation is held to be the only one," says Dr. Hodgson (I give the gist of his observations), "if it is claimed that all the communications of these discarnate minds are only suggestions from my subconscious self, it is unintelligible that, after having obtained satisfactory results from others whom I had known far less intimately than A and with whom I had consequently far fewer recollections in common, I should get from him, in the same sittings, nothing but incoherencies. I am thus driven to believe that my subliminal self is not the only thing in evidence,

that it is in the presence of a real, living personality, whose mental state is the same as it was at the hour of death, a personality which remains independent of my subliminal consciousness and absolutely unaffected by it, which is deaf to its suggestions and draws from its own resources the revelations which it makes."

The argument is not without value, but its full force would be obtained only if it were certain that none of those present knew of A's madness; otherwise it can be contended that, the notion of madness having penetrated the subconscious intelligence of one of them, it worked upon it and gave to the replies induced a form in keeping with the state of mind presupposed in the dead man.

9

Of a truth, by extending the possibilities of the medium to these extremes, we furnish ourselves with explanations which forestall nearly everything, bar every road and all but deny to the spirits any power of manifesting themselves in the manner which they appear to have chosen. But why do they choose that manner? Why do they thus restrict themselves? Why do they jealously hug the

narrow strip of territory which memory occupies on the confines of both worlds and from which none but indecisive or questionable evidence can reach us? Are there then no other outlets, no other horizons? Why do they tarry around us, stagnant in their little pasts, when, in their freedom from the flesh, they ought to be able to wander at ease over the virgin stretches of space and time? Do they not yet know that the sign which will prove to us that they survive is to be found not with us, but with them, on the other side of the grave? Why do they come back with empty hands and empty words? Is that what one finds when one is steeped in infinity? Beyond our last hour is it all bare and shapeless and dim? If it be so, let them tell us; and the evidence of the darkness will at least possess a grandeur that is all too absent from these cross-examining methods. Of what use is it to die, if all life's trivialities continue? Is it really worth while to have passed through the terrifying gorges which open on the eternal fields, in order to remember that we had a great-uncle called Peter and that our Cousin Paul was afflicted with varicose veins and a gastric complaint? At that rate, I should choose for those whom I love the august and frozen

solitudes of the everlasting nothing. Though it be difficult for them, as they complain, to make themselves understood through a strange and sleep-bound organism, they tell us enough categorical details about the past to show that they could disclose similar details, if not about the future, which they perhaps do not yet know, at least about the lesser mysteries which surround us on every side and which our body alone prevents us from approaching. There are a thousand things, large or small, alike unknown to us, which we must perceive when feeble eyes no longer arrest our vision. It is in those regions from which a shadow separates us and not in foolish title-tattle of the past that they would at last find the clear and genuine proof which they seem to seek with such enthusiasm. Without demanding a great miracle, one would nevertheless think that we had the right to expect from a mind which nothing now enthrals some other discourse than that which it avoided when it was still subject to matter.

IV

OUR ULTIMATE CONSCIOUSNESS

IV

OUR ULTIMATE CONSCIOUSNESS

1

SURVIVAL with our present consciousness is nearly as impossible and nearly as incomprehensible as total annihilation. Moreover, even if it were admissible, it could not be dreadful. This is certain that, when the body disappears, all physical sufferings will disappear at the same time; for we cannot imagine a spirit suffering in a body which it no longer possesses. With them will vanish simultaneously all that we call mental or moral sufferings, seeing that all of them, if we examine them well, spring from the ties and habits of our senses. Our spirit feels the reaction of the sufferings of our body or of the bodies that surround it; it cannot suffer in itself or through itself. Slighted affection, shattered love, disappointments, failures, despair, betrayal, personal humiliations, as well as the sorrows and the loss of those whom it loves, acquire their potent sting only by passing through the body which it animates. Outside its

own pain, which is the pain of not knowing, the spirit, once delivered from its flesh, could suffer only in the recollection of the flesh. It is possible that it still grieves over the troubles of those whom it has left behind on earth. But to its eyes, since it no longer reckons the days, these troubles will seem so brief that it will not grasp their duration; and, knowing what they are and knowing whither they lead, it will not behold their severity.

The spirit is insensible to all that is not happiness. It is made only for infinite joy, which is the joy of knowing and understanding. It can grieve only at perceiving its own limits; but to perceive those limits, when there are no more bonds to space and time, is already to transcend them.

2

It becomes a question of knowing whether that spirit, sheltered from all sorrow, will remain itself, will perceive and recognise itself in the bosom of infinity and up to what point it is important that it should recognise itself. This brings us to the problems of survival without consciousness, or survival with a consciousness different from that of to-day

Survival without consciousness seems at first

sight the more probable. From the point of view of the good or ill awaiting us on the other side of the grave, it amounts to annihilation. It is lawful, therefore, for those who prefer the easiest solution and the most consistent with the present state of human thought to limit their anxiety to that. They have nothing to dread; for, on close inspection, every fear, if any remained, should deck itself with hopes. The body disintegrates and can no longer suffer; the mind, separated from the source of pleasure and pain, is extinguished, scattered and and lost in a boundless darkness; and what comes is the great peace so often prayed for, the sleep without measure, without dreams and without awakening.

But this is only a solution that fosters indolence. If we press those who speak of survival without consciousness, we perceive that they mean only their present consciousness, for man conceives no other; and we have just seen that it is almost impossible for that manner of consciousness to persist in infinity.

Unless, indeed, they would deny every sort of consciousness, even that cosmic consciousness into which their own will fall. But this were to solve

very quickly and very blindly, with a stroke of the sword in the night, the greatest and most mysterious question that can arise in a man's brain.

3

It is evident that, in the depths of our thought limited on every side, we shall never be able to form the least idea of an infinite consciousness. There is even an essential antinomy between the words consciousness and infinity. To speak of consciousness is to mean the most definite thing conceivable in the finite; consciousness, properly speaking, is the finite self-concentrated in order to discover and feel its closest limits, to the end that it may enjoy them as closely as possibly. On the other hand, it is impossible for us to separate the idea of intelligence from the idea of consciousness. Any intelligence that does not seem capable of transforming itself into consciousness becomes for us a mysterious phenomenon to which we give names more mysterious still, lest we should have to admit that we understand nothing of it at all. Now, on this little earth of ours, which is but a dot in space, we see expended in every scale of life, as for instance, in the wonderful combinations and organisms of the insect world,

a mass of intelligence so vast that our human intelligence cannot even dream of assessing it. Everything that exists—and man first of all—is incessantly drawing upon that inexhaustible reserve. We are therefore irresistibly driven to ask ourselves if that cosmic intelligence is not the emanation of an infinite consciousness, or if it must not, sooner or later, elaborate one. And this sets us tossing between two irreducible impossibilities. What is most probable is that here again we are judging everything from the lowlands of our anthropomorphism. At the summit of our infinitesimal life, we see only intelligence and consciousness, the extreme point of thought; and from this we infer that, at the summits of all lives, there could be naught but intelligence and consciousness, whereas these perhaps occupy only an inferior place in the hierarchy of spiritual or other possibilities.

4

Survival absolutely denuded of consciousness would, therefore, be possible only if we deny the existence of a cosmic consciousness. When once we admit this consciousness, under whatsoever form, we are bound to share in it; and, up to a cer-

tain point, the question is indistinguishable from that of the continuance of a more or less modified consciousness. There is, for the moment, no hope of solving it; but we are free to grope in its darkness, which is not perhaps equally dense at all points.

Here begins the open sea. Here begins the splendid adventure, the only one abreast with human curiosity, the only one that soars as high as its highest longing. Let us accustom ourselves to regard death as a form of life which we do not yet understand; let us learn to look upon it with the same eye that looks upon birth; and soon our mind will be accompanied to the steps of the tomb with the same glad expectation that greets a birth.

Suppose that a child in its mother's womb were endowed with a certain consciousness; that unborn twins, for instance, could, in some obscure fashion, exchange their impressions and communicate their hopes and fears to each other. Having known naught but the warm maternal shades, they would not feel straitened nor unhappy there. They would probably have no other idea than to prolong as long as possible that life of abundance free from cares and of sleep free from alarms. But, if, even

as we are aware that we must die, they too knew that they must be born, that is to say, that they must suddenly leave the shelter of that gentle darkness and bandon for ever that captive but peaceful existence, to be precipitated into an absolutely different, unimaginable and boundless world, how great would be their anxieties and their fears! And yet there is no reason why our own anxieties and fears should be more justified or less ridiculous. The character, the spirit, the intentions, the benevolence or the indifference of the unknown to which we are subject do not alter between our birth and our death. We remain always in the same infinity, in the same universe. It is perfectly reasonable and legitimate to persuade ourselves that the tomb is no more dreadful than the cradle. It would even be legitimate and reasonable to accept the cradle only on account of the tomb. If, before being born, we were permitted to choose between the great peace of non-existence and a life that should not be completed by the glorious hour of death, which of us, knowing what he ought to know, would accept the disquieting problem of an existence that would not lead to the reassuring mystery of its end? Which of us would wish to come into

a world where we can learn so little, if he did not know that he must enter it if he would leave it and learn more? The best thing about life is that it prepares this hour for us, that it is the one and only road leading to the magic gateway and into that incomparable mystery where misfortunes and sufferings will no longer be possible, because we shall have lost the body that produced them; where the worst that can befall us is the dreamless sleep which we number among the greatest boons on earth; where, lastly, it is almost unimaginable that a thought should not survive to mingle with the substance of the universe, that is to say, with infinity, which, if it be not a waste of indifference can be nothing but a sea of joy.

5

Before fathoming that sea, let us remark to those who aspire to maintain their ego that they are calling for the sufferings which they dread. The ego implies limits. The ego cannot subsist except in so far as it is separated from that which surrounds it. The stronger the ego, the narrower its limits and the clearer the separation. The more painful too; for the mind, if it remain as we know it—and

we are not able to imagine it different—will no sooner have seen its limits than it will wish to overstep them; and, the more separated it feels, the greater will be its longing to unite with that which lies outside. There will therefore be an eternal struggle between its being and its aspirations. And really it would have served no object to be born and die only to arrive at these interminable contests. Have we not here yet one more proof that our ego, as we conceive it, could never subsist in the infinity where it must needs go, since it cannot go elsewhere? It behoves us therefore to clear away conceptions that emanate only from our body, even as the mists that veil the daylight from our sight emanate only from the lowlands. Pascal has said, once and for all:

"The narrow limits of our being conceal infinity from our view."

6

On the other hand—for we must keep nothing back, nor turn from the adverse darkness should it seem nearest to the truth, nor show any bias—on the other hand, we can grant to those who yearn to remain as they are that the survivial of an atom of

themselves would suffice for a new entrance into an infinity from which their body no longer separates them.

If it seems impossible that anything—a movement, a vibration, a radiation—should stop or disappear, why then should thought be lost? There will, no doubt, subsist more than one idea powerful enough to allure the new ego, which will nourish itself and thrive on all that it will find in that boundless environment, just as the other ego, on this earth, nourished itself and throve on all that it met there. Since we have been able to acquire our present consciousness, why should it be impossible for us to acquire another? For that ego which is so dear to us and which we believe ourselves to possess was not made in a day; it is not at present what it was at the hour of our birth. Much more chance than purpose has entered into it; and much more alien substance than any inborn substance which it contained. It is but a long series of acquisitions and transformations, of which we do not become aware until the awakening of our memory; and its kernel, of which we do not know the nature, is perhaps more immaterial and less concrete than a thought. If the new environment which we enter on leaving

our mother's womb transforms us to such a point that there is, so to speak, no connection between the embryo that we were and the man that we have become, is it not right to think that the far newer, stranger, wider and richer environment which we enter on quitting life will transform us even more? We can see in what happens to us here a figure of what awaits us elsewhere and can readily admit that our spiritual being, liberated from its body, if it does not mingle at the first onset with the infinite, will develop itself there gradually, will choose itself a substance and, no longer trammelled by space and time, will go on for ever growing. It is very possible that our loftiest wishes of to-day will become the law of our future development. It is very possible that our best thoughts will welcome us on the farther shore and that the quality of our intellect will determine that of the infinite which crystallises around it. Every hypothesis is permissible and every question, provided it be addressed to happiness; for unhappiness is no longer able to answer us. It finds no place in the human imagination that methodically explores the future. And, whatever be the force that survives us and presides over our existence in the other world, this existence, to pre-

sume the worst, could be no less great, no less happy than that of to-day. It will have no other career than infinity; and infinity is nothing if it be not felicity. In any case, it seems fairly certain that we spend in this world the only narrow, grudging, obscure and sorrowful moment of our destiny.

7

We have said that the peculiar sorrow of the mind is the sorrow of not knowing or not understanding, which includes the sorrow of being powerless; for he who knows the supreme causes, being no longer paralysed by matter, becomes one with them and acts with them: and he who understands ends by approving, or else the universe would be a mistake, which is not possible, an infinite mistake being inconceivable. I do not believe that another sorrow of the sheer mind can be imagined. The only one sorrow which, at first thought, might seem admissible—and which, in any case, could be but ephemeral—would arise from the sight of the pain and misery remaining on the earth which we have left. But this sorrow, after all, would be but one aspect and an insignificant phase of the sorrow of being powerless and of not understanding. As for the

latter, though it is not only beyond the domain of our intelligence, but even at an insuperable distance from our imagination, we may say that it would be intolerable only if it were without hope. But, for that, the universe would have to abandon any attempt to understand itself, or else admit within itself an object that remained for ever foreign to it. Either the mind will not perceive its limits and, consequently, will not suffer from them, or else it will overstep them as it perceives them; for how could the universe have parts eternally condemned to form no part of itself and of its knowledge? Hence we cannot understand that the torture of not understanding, supposing it to exist for a moment, should not end by absorption in the state of infinity, which, if it be not happiness as we comprehend it, could be naught but an indifference higher and purer than joy.

V

THE TWO ASPECTS OF INFINITY

V

THE TWO ASPECTS OF INFINITY

1

LET us turn our thoughts towards it. The problem goes beyond humanity and embraces all things. It is possible, I think, to view infinity under two distinct aspects. Let us contemplate the first of them. We are plunged in a universe that has no limits in space or time. It can neither go forward nor go back. It has no origin. It never began, nor will it ever end. The myriads of years behind it are even as the myriads which it has yet to unroll. From all time it has been at the boundless centre of the days. It could have no aim, for, if it had one, it would have attained it in the infinity of the years that lie behind us; besides, that aim would lie outside itself and, if anything lay outside it, infinity would be bounded by that thing and would cease to be infinity. It is not making for anywhere, for it would have ar-

rived there; consequently, all that the worlds within its pale, all that we ourselves do can have no influence upon it. All that it will do it has done. All that it has not done remains undone because it can never do it. If it have no mind, it will never have one. If it have one, that mind has been at its climax from all time and will remain there, changeless and immovable. It is as young as it has ever been and as old as it will ever be. It has made in the past all the efforts and all the trials which it will make in the future; and, as all the possible combinations have been exhausted since what we cannot even call the beginning, it does not seem as if that which has not taken place in the eternity that stretches before our birth can happen in the eternity that will follow our death. If it have not become conscious, it will never become conscious; if it know not what it wishes, it will continue in ignorance, hopelessly, knowing all or knowing nothing and remaining as near its end as its beginning.

This is the gloomiest thought to which man can attain. So far, I do not think that its depths have been sufficiently sounded. If it were really irrefutable—and some may contend that it is—if it actually contained the last word of the great riddle, it

would be almost impossible to live in its shadow. Naught save the certainty that our conceptions of time and space are illusive and absurd can lighten the abyss wherein our last hope would perish.

2

The universe thus conceived would be, if not intelligible, at least admissible by our reason; but in that universe float billions of worlds limited by space and time. They are born, they die and they are born again. They form part of the whole; and we see, therefore, that parts of that which has neither beginning nor end themselves begin and end. We, in fact, know only those parts; and they are of a number so infinite that in our eyes they fill all infinity. That which is going nowhere teems with that which appears to be going somewhere. That which has always known what it wants, or will never learn, seems to be eternally experimenting with more or less ill-success. At what goal is it aiming, since it is already there? Everything that we discover in that which could not possibly have an object looks as though it were pursuing one with inconceivable ardour; and the mind that animates what we see, in that which should know everything

and possess itself, seems to know nothing and to seek itself without intermission. Thus all that is apparent to our senses in infinity gainsays that which our reason is compelled to ascribe to it. According as we fathom it, we come to understand how deep is our want of understanding; and, the more we strive to penetrate the two incomprehensible problems that stand face to face, the more they contradict each other.

3

What will become of us amid all this confusion? Shall we leave the finite wherein we dwell to be swallowed up in this or the other infinite? In other words, shall we end by absorption in the infinite which our reason conceives, or shall we remain eternally in that which our eyes behold, that is to say, in numberless changing and ephemeral worlds? Shall we never leave those worlds which seem doomed to die and to be reborn eternally, to enter at last into that which, from all eternity, can neither have been born nor have died and which exists without either future or past? Shall we one day escape, with all that surrounds us, from this unhappy speculation, to find our way at last into peace, wisdom, changeless and boundless consciousness, or into

hopeless unconsciousness? Shall we have the fate which our senses foretell, or that which our intelligence demands? Or are both senses and intelligence only illusions, puny implements, vain weapons of an hour, which were never intended to examine or defy the universe? If there really be a contradiction, is it wise to accept it and deem impossible that which we do not understand, seeing that we understand almost nothing? Is truth not at an immeasurable distance from these inconsistencies which appear to us enormous and irreducible and which, doubtless, are of no more importance than the rain that falls upon the sea?

4

But, even to our poor understanding of to-day, the discrepancy between the infinity conceived by our reason and that perceived by our senses is perhaps more apparent than real. When we say that, in a universe that has existed since all eternity, every experiment, every possible combination has been made; when we declare that there is no chance that what has not taken place in the immeasurable past can take place in the immeasurable future, our imagination perhaps attributes to the infinity of

time a preponderance which it cannot possess. In truth, all that infinity contains must be as infinite as the time at its disposal; and the chances, encounters and combinations that lie therein have not been exhausted in the eternity that has gone before us any more than they could be in the eternity that will come after us. The infinity of time is no vaster than the infinity of the substance of the universe. Events, forces, chances, causes, effects, phenomena, fusions, combinations, coincidences, harmonies, unions, possibilities, lives are represented in it by countless numbers that entirely fill a bottomless and vergeless abyss where they have been shaken together from what we call the beginning of the world that had no beginning and where they will be stirred up until the end of a world that will have no end. There is, therefore, no climax, no changelessness, no immovability. It is probable that the universe is seeking and finding itself every day, that it has not become entirely conscious and does not yet know what it wants. It is possible that its ideal is still veiled by the shadow of its immensity; it is also possible that experiments and chances are following one upon the other in unimaginable worlds, compared wherewith all those which we see on starry

nights are no more than a pinch of gold-dust in the ocean depths. Lastly, if either be true, it is also true that we ourselves, or what remains of us—it matters not—will profit one day by those experiments and those chances. That which has not yet happened may suddenly supervene; and the next state, with the supreme wisdom which will recognise and be able to establish that state, is perhaps ready to arise from the clash of circumstances. It would not be at all astonishing if the consciousness of the universe, in the endeavour to form itself, had not yet encountered the combination of necessary chances and if human thought were actually supporting one of those decisive chances. Here there is a hope. Small as man and his brain may appear, they have exactly the value of the most enormous forces that they are able to conceive, since there is neither great nor small in the immensurable; and, if our body equalled the dimensions of all the worlds which our eyes can see, it would have exactly the same weight and the same importance, as compared with the universe, that it has to-day. The mind alone perhaps occupies in infinity a space which comparisons do not reduce to nothing.

5

For the rest, if everything must be said, at the cost of constantly and shamelessly contradicting one's self in the dark, and to return to the first supposition, the idea of possible progress, it is extremely probable that this again is one of those childish disorders of our brain which prevent us from seeing the thing that is. It is quite as probable, as we have seen above, that there never was, that there never will be any progress, because there could not be a goal. At most there may occur a few ephemeral combinations which, to our poor eyes, will seem happier or more beautiful than the others. Even so we think gold more beautiful than the mud in the street, or the flower in a splendid garden happier than the stone at the bottom of a drain; but all this, obviously, is of no importance, has no corresponding reality and proves nothing in particular.

The more we reflect upon it, the more pronounced is the infirmity of our intelligence which cannot succeed in reconciling the idea of progress and even the idea of experiment with the supreme idea of infinity. Although nature has been incessantly and indefatigably repeating herself before our eyes for thousands of years, reproducing the same trees and

the same animals, we cannot contrive to understand why the universe indefinitely recommences experiments that have been made billions of times. It is inevitable that, in the innumerable combinations that have been and are being made in termless time and boundless space, there have been and still are millions of planets and consequently millions of human races exactly similar to our own, side by side with myriads of others more or less different from it. Let us not say to ourselves that it would require an unimaginable concourse of circumstances to reproduce a globe like unto our earth in every respect. We must remember that we are in the infinite and that this unimaginable concourse must necessarily take place in the innumerousness which we are unable to imagine. Though it need billions and billions of cases for two features to coincide, those billions and billions will encumber infinity no more than would a single case. Place an infinite number of worlds in an infinite number of infinitely diverse circumstances: there will always be an infinite number for which those circumstances will be alike; if not, we should be setting bounds to our idea of the universe, which would forthwith become more incomprehensible still. From the moment that we

insist sufficiently upon that thought, we necessarily arrive at these conclusions. If they have not struck us hitherto, it is because we never go to the farthest point of our imagination. Now the farthest point of our imagination is but the beginning of reality and gives us only a small, purely human universe, which, vast as it may seem, dances in the real universe like an apple on the sea. I repeat, if we do not admit that thousands of worlds, similar in all points to our own, in spite of the billions of adverse chances, have always existed and still exist to-day, we are sapping the foundations of the only possible conception of the universe or of infinity.

6

Now how is it that those millions of exactly similar human races, which from all time suffer what we have suffered and are still suffering, profit us nothing, that all their experiences and all their schools have had no influence upon our first efforts and that everything has to be done again and begun again incessantly?

As we see, the two theories balance each other. It is well to acquire by degrees the habit of understanding nothing. There remains to us the faculty

of choosing the less gloomy of the two or persuading ourselves that the mists of the other exist only in our brain. As that strange visionary, William Blake, said:

> "Nor is it possible to thought
> A greater than itself to know."

Let us add that it is not possible for it to know anything other than itself. What we do not know would be enough to create the world afresh; and what we do know cannot add one moment to the life of a fly. Who can tell but that our chief mistake lies in believing that an intelligence, were it an intelligence thousands of times as great as ours, directs the universe? It may be a force of quite another nature, a force that differs as widely from that on which our brain prides itself as electricity, for instance, differs from the wind that blows. That is why it is fairly probable that our mind, however powerful it become, will always grope in mystery. If it be certain that everything in us must also be in nature, because everything comes to us from her, if the mind and all the logic which it has placed at the culminating point of our being direct or seem to direct all the actions of our life, it by no means fol-

lows that there is not in the universe a force greatly superior to thought, a force having no imaginable relation to the mind, a force which animates and governs all things according to other laws and of which nothing is found in us but almost imperceptible traces, even as almost imperceptible traces of thought are all that can be found in plants and minerals.

In any case, there is nothing here to make us lose courage. It is necessarily the human illusion of evil, ugliness, uselessness and impossibility that is to blame. We must wait not for the universe to be transformed, but for our intelligence to expand or to take part in the other force; and we must maintain our confidence in a world which knows nothing of our conceptions of purpose and progress, because it doubtless has ideas whereof we have no idea, a world, moreover, which could scarcely wish itself harm.

7

"These are but vain speculations," it will be said. "What matters, after all, the idea which we form of those things which belong to the unknowable, seeing that the unknowable, were we a thousand times as intelligent as we are, is closed to us for ever and

that the idea which we form of it will never have any value?"

That is true; but there are degrees in our ignorance of the unknowable; and each of these degrees marks a triumph of the intelligence. To estimate more and more completely the extent of what it does not know is all that man's knowledge can hope for. Our idea of the unknowable was and always will be valueless, I admit; but it nevertheless is and will remain the most important idea of mankind. All our morality, all that is in the highest degree noble and profound in our existence has always been based on this idea devoid of real value. To-day, as yesterday, even though it be possible to recognise more clearly that it is too incomplete and relative ever to have any actual value, it is necessary to carry it as high and as far as we can. It alone creates the only atmosphere wherein the best part of ourselves can live. Yes, it is the unknowable into which we shall not enter; but that is no reason for saying to ourselves:

"I am closing all the doors and all the windows; henceforth, I shall interest myself only in things which my everyday intelligence can compass. Those

things alone have the right to influence my actions and my thoughts."

Where should we arrive at that rate? What things can my intelligence compass? Is there a thing in this world that can be separated from the inconceivable? Since there is no means of eliminating that inconceivable, it is reasonable and salutary to make the best of it and therefore to imagine it as stupendously vast as we are able. The gravest reproach that can be brought against the positive religions and notably against Christianity is that they have too often, if not in theory, at least in practice, encouraged such a narrowing of the mystery of the universe. By broadening it, we broaden the space wherein our mind will move. It is for us what we make it: let us then form it of all that we can reach on the horizon of ourselves. As for the mystery itself, we shall, of course, never reach it; but we have a much greater chance of approaching it by facing it and going whither it draws us than by turning our backs upon it and returning to that place where we well know that it no longer is. Not by diminishing our thoughts shall we diminish the distance that separates us from the ultimate truths; but by enlarging them as much as possible we are

sure of deceiving ourselves as little as possible. And the loftier our idea of the infinite, the more buoyant and the purer becomes the spiritual atmosphere wherein we live and the wider and deeper the horizon against which our thoughts and feelings stand out, the horizon which is all their life and which they inspire.

"Perpetually to construct ideas requiring the utmost stretch of our faculties," wrote Herbert Spencer, "and perpetually to find that such ideas must be abandoned as futile imaginations, may realise to us more fully than any other course the greatness of that which we vainly strive to grasp. . . . By continually seeking to know and being continually thrown back with a deepened conviction of the impossibility of knowing, we may keep alive the consciousness that it is alike our highest wisdom and our highest duty to regard that through which all things exist as the Unknowable."

8

Whatever the ultimate truth may be, whether we admit the abstract, absolute and perfect infinity—the changeless, immovable infinity which has attained perfection and which knows everything, to

which our reason tends—or whether we prefer that offered to us by the evidence, undeniable here below, of our senses—the infinity which seeks itself, which is still evolving and not yet established—it behoves us above all to foresee in it our fate, which, for that matter, must, in either case, end by absorption in that very infinity.

VI

OUR FATE IN THOSE INFINITIES

VI

OUR FATE IN THOSE INFINITIES

1

THE first infinity, the ideal infinity, corresponds most nearly with the requirements of our reason, which does not justify us in giving it the preference. It is impossible for us to foresee what we shall become in it, because it seems to exclude any becoming. It therefore but remains for us to address ourselves to the second, to that which we see and imagine in time and space. Furthermore, it is possible that it may precede the other. However absolute our conception of the universe, we have seen that we can always admit that what has not taken place in the eternity before us will happen in the eternity after us and that there is nothing save an untold number of chances to prevent the universe from acquiring in the end that perfect consciousness which will establish it at its zenith.

2

Behold us, then, in the infinity of those worlds, the stellar infinity, the infinity of the heavens, which assuredly veils other things from our eyes, but which cannot be a total illusion. It seems to us to be peopled only with objects—planets, suns, stars, nebulæ, atoms, imponderous fluids—which move, unite and separate, repel and attract one another, which shrink and expand, are for ever shifting and never arrive, which measure space in that which has no confines and number the hours in that which has no term. In a word, we are in an infinity that seems to have almost the same character and the same habits as that power in the midst of which we breathe and which, upon our earth, we call nature or life.

What will be our fate in that infinity? We are asking ourselves no idle question, even if we should unite with it after losing all consciousness, all notion of the ego, even if we should exist there as no more than a little nameless substance—soul or matter, we cannot tell—suspended in the equally nameless abyss that replaces time and space. It is not an idle question, for it concerns the history of the worlds or of the universe; and this history, far more

than that of our petty existence, is our own great history, in which perhaps something of ourselves or something incomparably better and vaster will end by meeting us again some day.

3

Shall we be unhappy there? It is hardly reassuring when we consider the ways of nature and remember that we form part of a universe that has not yet gathered its wisdom. We have seen, it is true, that good and bad fortune exist only in so far as regards our body and that, when we have lost the organ of suffering, we shall not meet any of the earthly sorrows again. But our anxiety does not end here; and will not our mind, lingering upon our erstwhile sorrows, drifting derelict from world to world, unknown to itself in an unknowable that seeks itself hopelessly, will not our mind know here the frightful torture of which we have already spoken and which is doubtless the last that imagination can touch with its wing? Finally, if there were nothing left of our body and our mind, there would still remain the matter and the spirit (or, at least, the obviously single force to which we give that double name) which composed them and whose fate

must be no more indifferent to us than our own fate; for, let us repeat, from our death onwards, the adventure of the universe becomes our own adventure. Let us not, therefore, say to ourselves:

"What can it matter? We shall not be there."

We shall be there always, because everything will be there.

4

And will this everything wherein we shall be included, in a world ever seeking itself, continue a prey to new and perpetual and perhaps painful experiences? Since the part that we were was unhappy, why should the part that we shall be enjoy a better fortune? Who can assure us that yonder the unending combinations and endeavours will not be more sorrowful, more stupid and more baneful than those which we are leaving; and how shall we explain that these have come about after so many millions of others which ought to have opened the eyes of the genius of infinity? It is idle to persuade ourselves, as Hindu wisdom would, that our sorrows are but illusions and appearances: it is none the less true that they make us very really unhappy. Has the universe elsewhere a more complete conscious-

ness, a more just and serene understanding than on this earth and in the worlds which we discern? And, if it be true that it has somewhere attained that better understanding, why does the mind that presides over the destinies of our earth not profit by it? Is no communication possible between worlds which must have been born of the same idea and which lie in its depths? What would be the mystery of that isolation? Are we to believe that the earth marks the farthest stage and the most successful experiment? What, then, can the mind of the universe have done, and against what darkness must it have struggled, to have come only to this? But, on the other hand, that darkness and those barriers which can have come only from itself, since they could have arisen no elsewhere, have they the power to stay its progress? Who then could have set those insoluble problems to infinity and from what more remote and profound region than itself could they have issued? Some one, after all, must know the answer; and, as behind infinity there can be none that is not infinity itself, it is impossible to imagine a malignant will in a will that leaves no point around it which is not wholly covered. Or are the experiments begun in the stars continued mechanically,

by virtue of the force acquired, without regard to their uselessness and their pitiful consequences, according to the custom of nature, who knows nothing of our parsimony and squanders the suns in space as she does the seed on earth, knowing that nothing can be lost? Or, again, is the whole question of our peace and happiness, like that of the fate of the worlds, reduced to knowing whether or not the infinity of endeavours and combinations be equal to that of eternity? Or, lastly, to come to what is most likely, is it we who deceive ourselves, who know nothing, who see nothing and who consider imperfect that which is perhaps faultless, we who are but an infinitesimal fragment of the intelligence which we judge by the aid of the little shreds of understanding which it has vouchsafed to lend us?

5

How could we reply, how could our thoughts and glances penetrate the infinite and the invisible, we who do not understand nor even see the thing by which we see and which is the source of all our thoughts? In fact, as has been very justly observed, man does not see light itself. He sees only matter, or rather the small part of the great worlds

which he knows by the name of matter, touched by light. He does not perceive the immense rays that cross the heavens save at the moment when they stopped by an object akin to those with which his eye is familiar upon this earth: were it otherwise, the whole space filled with innumerable suns and boundless forces, instead of being an abyss of absolute darkness, absorbing and extinguishing shafts of light that shoot across it from every side, would be but a monstrous and unbearable ocean of flashes.

And, if we do not see the light, at least we think we know a few of its rays or its reflexions; but we are absolutely ignorant of that which is unquestionably the essential law of the universe, namely, gravitation. What is that force, the most powerful of all and the least visible, imperceptible to our senses, without form, without colour, without temperature, without substance, without savour and without voice, but so awful that it suspends and moves in space all the worlds which we see and all those which we shall never know? More rapid, more subtle, more incorporeal than thought, it wields such sway over everything that exists, from the infinitely great to the infinitely small, that there is not a grain of sand upon our earth nor a drop of blood in our

veins but are penetrated, wrought upon and quickened by it until they act at every moment upon the farthest planet of the last solar system that we struggle to imagine beyond the bounds of our imagination.

Shakspeare's famous lines,

> "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
> Than are dreamt of in your philosophy,"

have long since become utterly inadequate. There are no longer more things than our philosophy can dream of or imagine: there is none but things which it cannot dream of, there is nothing but the unimaginable; and, if we do not even see the light, which is the one thing that we believed we saw, it may be said that there is nothing all around us but the invisible.

We move in the illusion of seeing and knowing that which is strictly indispensable to our little lives. As for all the rest, which is well-nigh everything, our organs not only debar us from reaching, seeing or feeling it, but even restrain us from suspecting what it is, just as they would prevent us from understanding it if an intelligence of a different order were to bethink itself of revealing or explaining it

to us. The number and volume of those mysteries is as boundless as the universe itself. If mankind were one day to draw near to those which to-day it deems the greatest and the most inaccessible, such as the origin and the aim of life, it would at once behold rising up behind them, like eternal mountains, others quite as great and quite as unfathomable; and so on, without end. In relation to that which it would have to know in order to hold the key to the riddle of this world, it would always find itself at the same point of central ignorance. It would be just the same if we possessed an intelligence several million times greater and more penetrating than ours. All that its miraculously increased power could discover would encounter limits no less impassable than at present. All is boundless in that which has no bounds. We shall be the eternal prisoners of the universe. It is therefore impossible for us to appreciate in any degree whatsoever, in the smallest conceivable respect, the present state of the universe and to say, as long as we are men, whether it follows a straight line or describes an immense circle, whether it is growing wiser or madder, whether it is advancing towards the eternity which has no end or retracing its steps

towards that which had no beginning. Our sole privilege within our tiny confines is to struggle towards that which appears to us the best and to remain heroically persuaded that no part of what we do within those confines can ever be wholly lost.

6

But let not all these insoluble questions drive us towards fear. From the point of view of our future beyond the grave, it is in no way necessary that we should have an answer to everything. Whether the universe have already found its consciousness, whether it find it one day or seek it everlastingly, it could not exist for the purpose of being unhappy and of suffering, either in its entirety, or in any one of its parts; and it matters little if the latter be invisible or incommensurable, considering that the smallest is as great as the greatest in what has neither limit nor measure. To torture a point is the same thing as to torture the worlds; and, if it torture the worlds, it is its own substance that it tortures. Its very fate, wherein we have our part, protects us; for we are simply morsels of infinity. It is inseparable from us as we are inseparable from it. Its breath is our breath, its aim is our aim and

we bear within us all its mysteries. We participate in it everywhere. There is naught in us that escapes it; there is naught in it but belongs to us. It extends us, fills us, traverses us on every side. In space and time and in that which, beyond space and time, has as yet no name, we represent it and summarise it completely, with all its properties and all its future; and, if its immensity terrifies us, we are as terrifying as itself.

If, therefore, we had to suffer in it, our sufferings could be but ephemeral; and nothing matters that is not eternal. It is possible, although somewhat incomprehensible, that parts should err and go astray; but it is impossible that sorrow should be one of its lasting and necessary laws; for it would have brought that law to bear against itself. In like manner, the universe is and must be its own law and its sole master: if not, the law or the master whom it must obey would be the universe alone; and the centre of a word which we pronounce without being able to grasp its scope would be simply shifted. If it be unhappy, that means that it wills its own unhappiness; if it will its unhappiness, it is mad; and, if it appear to us mad, that means that our reason works contrary to everything and to the

only laws possible, seeing that they are eternal, or, to speak more humbly, that it judges what it wholly fails to understand.

7

Everything, therefore, must end, or perhaps already be, if not in a state of happiness, at least in a state exempt from all suffering, all anxiety, all lasting unhappiness; and what, after all, is our happiness upon this earth, if it be not the absence of sorrow, anxiety and unhappiness?

But it is childish to talk of happiness and unhappiness where infinity is in question. The idea which we entertain of happiness and unhappiness is something so special, so human, so fragile that it does not exceed our stature and falls to dust as soon as we take it out of its little sphere. It proceeds entirely from a few contingencies of our nerves, which are made to appreciate very slight happenings, but which could as easily have felt everything the opposite way and taken pleasure in that which is now pain.

I do not know if my readers remember the striking passage in which Sir William Crookes shows how well-nigh all that we consider as essential laws of nature would be falsified in the eyes of a microscopic

man, while forces of which we are almost wholly ignorant, such as surface-tension, capillarity or the Brownian movements, would preponderate. Walking on a cabbage-leaf, for instance, after the dew had fallen, and seeing it studded with huge crystal globes, he would infer that water was a solid body which assumes spherical form and rises in the air. At no great distance, he might come to a pond, when he would observe that this same matter, instead of rising upwards, now seems to slope downwards in a vast curve from the brink. If he managed, with the aid of his friends, to throw into the water one of those enormous steel bars which we call needles, he would see that it made a sort of concave trough on the surface and floated tranquilly. From these experiments and a thousand others which he might make, he would naturally deduce theories diametrically opposed to those upon which our entire existence is based. It would be the same if the changes were made in the direction of time, to take an hypothesis imagined by the philosopher William James:

"Suppose we were able, within the length of a second, to note distinctly ten thousand events instead of barely ten, as now; if our life were then

destined to hold the same number of impressions it might be a thousand times as short. We should live less than a month, and personally know nothing of the change of seasons. If born in winter, we should believe in summer as we now believe in the heats of the carboniferous era. The motions of organic beings would be so slow to our senses as to be inferred, not seen. The sun would stand still in the sky, the moon be almost free from change and so on. But now reverse the hypothesis, and suppose a being to get only one thousandth part of the sensations that we get in a given time, and consequently to live a thousand times as long. Winters and summers will be to him like quarters of an hour. Mushrooms and the swifter growing plants will shoot into being so rapidly as to appear instantaneous creations; annual shrubs will rise and fall from the earth like restlessly boiling water-springs; the motions of animals will be as invisible as are to us the movements of bullets and cannon-balls; the sun will scour through the sky like a meteor, leaving a fiery trail behind him, &c. That such imaginary cases (barring the super-human longevity) may be realised somewhere in the animal kingdom, it would be rash to deny."

8

We believe that we see nothing hanging over us but catastrophes, deaths, torments and disasters; we shiver at the mere thought of the great interplanetary spaces, with their intense cold and their awful and gloomy solitudes; and we imagine that the worlds that revolve through space are as unhappy as ourselves because they freeze, or disaggregate, or clash together, or are consumed in unutterable flames. We infer from this that the genius of the universe is an abominable tyrant, seized with a monstrous madness, delighting only in the torture of itself and all that it contains. To millions of stars, each many thousand times larger than our sun, to nebulæ whose nature and dimensions no figure, no word in our language is able to express, we attribute our momentary sensibility, the little ephemeral play of our nerves; and we are convinced that life there must be impossible or appalling, because we should feel too hot or too cold. It were much wiser to say to ourselves that it would need but a trifle, a few papillæ more or less to our skin, the slightest modification of our eyes and ears, to turn the temperature of space, its silence and its dark-

ness into a delicious springtime, an incomparable music, a divine light.

"Nothing is too wonderful to be true," said Faraday.

It were much more reasonable to persuade ourselves that the catastrophes which our imagination sees there are life itself, the joy and one or other of those immense festivals of mind and matter in which death, thrusting aside at last our two enemies, time and space, will soon permit us to take part. Each world dissolving, extinguished, crumbling, burnt or colliding with another world and pulverised means the commencement of a magnificent experiment, the dawn of a marvellous hope and perhaps an unexpected happiness drawn direct from the inexhaustible unknown. What though they freeze or flame, collect or disperse, pursue or flee one another: mind and matter, no longer united by the same pitiful hazard that joined them in us, must rejoice at all that happens; for all is but birth and rebirth, a departure into an unknown filled with wonderful promises and maybe an anticipation of some ineffable event.

VII

CONCLUSIONS

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1

IN order to retain a livelier image of all this and a more exact memory, let us give a last glance at the road which we have travelled. We have put aside, for reasons which we have stated, the religious solutions and total annihilation. Annihilation is physically impossible; the religious solutions occupy a citadel without doors or windows into which human reason does not penetrate. Next comes the theory of the survival of our ego, released from its body, but retaining a full and unimpaired consciousness of its identity. We have seen that this theory, strictly defined, has very little likelihood and is not greatly to be desired, although, with the surrender of the body, the source of all our ills, it seems less to be feared than our actual existence. On the other hand, as soon as we try to extend or to exalt it, so that it may appear less barbarous or

less crude, we come back to the theory of a cosmic consciousness or of a modified consciousness, which, together with that of survival without any sort of consciousness, closes the field to every supposition and exhausts every forecast of the imagination.

Survival without any sort of consciousness would be tantamount for us to annihilation pure and simple and consequently would be no more dreadful than the latter, that is to say, than a sleep with no dreams and with no awakening. The theory is unquestionably more acceptable than that of annihilation; but it prejudges very rashly the questions of a cosmic consciousness and of a modified consciousness.

2

Before replying to these, we must choose our universe, for we have the choice. It is a matter of knowing how we propose to look at infinity. Is it the moveless, immovable infinity, from all eternity perfect and at its zenith, and the purposeless universe that our reason will conceive at the farthest point of our thoughts? Do we believe that, at our death, the illusion of movement and progress which we see from the depths of this life will suddenly fade away? If so, it is inevitable that, at our last breath,

we shall be absorbed in what, for lack of a better term, we call the cosmic consciousness. Are we, on the other hand, persuaded that death will reveal to us that the illusion lies not in our senses but in our reason and that, in a world incontestably alive, despite the eternity preceding our birth, all the experiments have not been made, that is to say that movement and evolution continue and will never and nowhere stop? In that case, we must at once accept the theory of a modified or progressive consciousness. The two aspects, after all, are equally unintelligible but defensible; and, although really irreconcilable, they agree on one point, namely, that unending pain and unredeemed misery are alike excluded from them both for ever.

3

The theory of a modified consciousness does not necessitate the loss of the tiny consciousness acquired in our body; but it makes it almost negligible, flings, drowns and dissolves it in infinity. It is of course impossible to support this theory with satisfactory proofs; but it is not easy to shatter it like the others. Were it permissible to speak of likeness to truth in this connection, when our only truth is

that we do not see the truth, it is the most likely of the interim theories and gives a magnificent opening for the most plausible, varied and alluring dreams. Will our ego, our soul, our spirit, or whatever we call that which will survive us in order to continue us as we are, will it find again, on leaving the body, the innumerable lives which it must have lived since the thousands of years that had no beginning? Will it continue to increase by assimilating all that it meets in infinity during the thousands of years that will have no end? Will it linger for a time around our earth, leading, in regions invisible to our eyes, an ever higher and happier existence, as the theosophists and spiritualists contend? Will it move towards other planetary systems, will it emigrate to other worlds, whose existence is not even suspected by our senses? Everything seems permissible in this great dream, save that which might arrest its flight.

Nevertheless, so soon as it ventures too far in the ultramondane spaces, it crashes into strange obstacles and breaks its wings against them. If we admit that our ego does not remain eternally what it was at the moment of our death, we can no longer imagine that, at a given second, it stops, ceases to

expand and rise, attains its perfection and its fulness, to become no more than a sort of motionless wreck suspended in eternity and a finished thing in the midst of that which will never finish. That would indeed be the only real death and the more fearful inasmuch as it would set a limit to an unparalleled life and intelligence, beside which those which we possess here below would not even weigh what a drop of water weighs when compared with the ocean, or a grain of sand when placed in the scales with a mountain-chain. In a word, either we believe that our evolution will one day stop, implying thereby an incomprehensible end and a sort of inconceivable death; or we admit that it has no limit, whereupon, being infinite, it assumes all the properties of infinity and must needs be lost in infinity and united with it. This, withal, is the latter end of theosophy, spiritualism and all the religions in which man, in his ultimate happiness, is absorbed by God. And this again is an incomprehensible end, but at least it is life. And then, taking one incomprehensibility with another, after doing all that is humanly possible to understand one or the other riddle, let us by preference leap into the greatest and therefore the most probable, the one which con-

tains all the others and after which nothing more remains. If not, the questions reappear at every stage and the answers are always conflicting. And questions and answers lead us to the same inevitable abyss. As we shall have to face it sooner or later, why not make for it straightway? All that happens to us in the interval interests us beyond a doubt, but does not detain us, because it is not eternal.

4

Behold us then before the mystery of the cosmic consciousness. Although we are incapable of understanding the act of an infinity that would have to fold itself up in order to feel itself and consequently to define itself and separate itself from other things, this is not an adequate reason for declaring it impossible; for, if we were to reject all the realities and impossibilities that we do not understand, there would be nothing left for us to live upon. If this consciousness exist under the form which we have conceived, it is evident that we shall be there and take part in it. If there be a consciousness somewhere, or some thing that takes the place of consciousness, we shall be in that consciousness or that thing, because we cannot be elsewhere.

And as this consciousness or this thing cannot be unhappy, because it is impossible that infinity should exist for its own unhappiness, neither shall we be unhappy when we are in it. Lastly, if the infinity into which we shall be projected have no sort of consciousness nor anything that stands for it, the reason will be that consciousness, or anything that might replace it, is not indispensable to eternal happiness.

5

That, I think, is about as much as we may be permitted to declare, for the moment, to the spirit anxiously facing the unfathomable space wherein death will shortly hurl it. It can still hope to find there the fulfilment of its dreams; it will perhaps find less to dread than it had feared. If it prefer to remain expectant and to accept none of the theories which I have expounded to the best of my power and without prejudice, it nevertheless seems difficult not to welcome, at least, this great assurance which we find at the bottom of every one of them, namely, that infinity could not be malevolent, seeing that, if it eternally tortured the least among us, it would be torturing something which it cannot tear out of

itself and that it would therefore be torturing its very self.

I have added nothing to what was already known. I have simply tried to separate what may be true from that which is assuredly not true; for, if we do not know where truth is, we nevertheless learn to know where it is not. And perhaps, in seeking for that undiscoverable truth, we shall have accustomed our eyes to pierce the terror of the last hour by looking it full in the face. Many things, beyond a doubt, remain to be said which others will say with greater force and brilliancy. But we need have no hope that any one will utter on this earth the word that shall put an end to our uncertainties. It is very probable, on the contrary, that no one in this world, nor perhaps in the next, will discover the great secret of the universe. And, if we reflect upon this even for a moment, it is most fortunate that it should be so. We have not only to resign ourselves to living in the incomprehensible, but to rejoice that we cannot go out of it. If there were no more insoluble questions nor impenetrable riddles, infinity would not be infinite; and then we should have for ever to curse the fate that placed us in a universe proportionate to our intelligence. All that exists

would be but a gateless prison, an irreparable evil and mistake. The unknown and the unknowable are necessary and will perhaps always be necessary to our happiness. In any case, I would not wish my worst enemy, were his understanding a thousandfold loftier and a thousandfold mightier than mine, to be condemned eternally to inhabit a world of which he had surprised an essential secret and of which, as a man, he had begun to grasp the least tittle.

VIII

THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE FUTURE

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1

WHAT is known as premonition or precognition leads us to mysterious regions, where stands, half-emerging from an intolerable darkness, the gravest problem that can thrill mankind, the knowledge of the future. The latest, the best and the most complete study devoted to it is, I believe, that published by M. Ernest Bozzano under the title *Des Phénomènes prémonitoires*. Availing himself of excellent earlier work, notably that of Mrs. Sidgwick and Myers,[1] and adding the result of his own researches, the author collects some thousand cases of precognition, of which he discusses one hundred and sixty, leaving the great majority of the others on one side, not because they are negligible, but because he does

[1] *Proceedings*, Vols. V. and XI.

not wish to exceed too flagrantly the normal limits of a monograph.

He begins by carefully eliminating all the episodes which, though apparently premonitory, may be explained by self-suggestion (as in the case, for instance, where some one smitten with a disease still latent seems to foresee this disease and the death which will be its conclusion), by telepathy (when a sensitive is aware before hand of the arrival of a person or a letter), or lastly by clairvoyance (when a man dreams of the spot where he will find something which he has mislaid, or an uncommon plant, or an insect sought for in vain, or the unknown place which he will visit at some later date).

In all these cases, we have not, properly speaking, to do with a pure future, but rather with a present that is not yet known. Thus reduced and stripped of all foreign influences and intrusions, the number of instances wherein there is a really clear and incontestable perception of a fragment of the future remains large enough, contrary to what is generally believed, to make it impossible for us to speak of extraordinary accidents or wonderful coincidences. There must be a limit to everything, even to distrust, even to the most extensive incredulity,

otherwise all historical research and a good deal of scientific research would become decidedly impracticable. And this remark applies as much to the nature of the incidents related as to the actual authenticity of the narratives. We can contest or suspect any story whatever, any written proof, any evidence; but thenceforward we must abandon all certainty or knowledge that is not acquired by means of mathematical operations or laboratory experiments, that is to say, three-fourths of the human phenomena that chiefly interest us. Observe that the records collected by the investigators of the S. P. R., like those discussed by M. Bozzano, are all told at first hand and that those stories of which the narrators were not the protagonists or the direct witnesses have been ruthlessly rejected. Furthermore, some of these narratives are necessarily of the nature of medical observations; as for the others, if we attentively examine the character of those who have related them and the circumstances which corroborate them, we shall agree that it is more just and more reasonable to believe in them than to look upon every man who has an extraordinary experience as being *a priori* a liar, the victim of an hallucination, or a wag.

2

There could be no question of giving here even a brief analysis of the most striking cases. It would require a hundred pages and would alter the whole nature of this essay, which, to keep within its proper dimensions, must take it for granted that most of the materials which it examines are familiar. I therefore refer the reader who may wish to form an opinion for himself to the easily-accessible sources which I have mentioned above. It will suffice to give an accurate idea of the gravity of the problem to any one who has not time or opportunity to consult the original documents if I sum up in a few words some of these pioneer adventures, selected among those which seem least open to dispute; for it goes without saying that all have not the same value, otherwise the question would be settled. There are some which, while exceedingly striking at first sight and offering every guarantee that could be desired as to authenticity, nevertheless do not imply a real knowledge of the future and can be interpreted in another manner. I give one, to serve as an instance; it is reported by Dr. Alphonse Teste in his *Manuel pratique du magnetisme animal.*

On the 8th of May, Dr. Teste magnetises Mme. Hortense —— in the presence of her husband. She is no sooner asleep than she announces that she has been pregnant for a fortnight, that she will not go her full time, that "she will take fright at something," that she will have a fall and that the result will be a miscarriage. She adds that, on the 12th of May, after having had a fright, she will have a fainting-fit which will last for eight minutes; and she then describes, hour by hour, the course of her malady, which will end in three days' loss of reason, from which she will recover.

On awaking, she retains no recollection of anything that has passed; it is kept from her; and Dr. Teste communicates his notes to Dr. Amédée Latour. On the 12th of May, he calls on M. and Mme. ——, finds them at table and puts Mme. —— to sleep again, whereupon she repeats word for word what she told him four days before. They wake her up. The dangerous hour is drawing near. They take every imaginable precaution and even close the shutters. Mme. ——, made uneasy by these extraordinary measures which she is quite unable to understand, asks what they are going to do to her. Half-past three o'clock strikes. Mme. ——

rises from the sofa on which they have made her sit and wants to leave the room. The doctor and her husband try to prevent her.

"But what is the matter with you?" she asks. "I simply must go out."

"No, madame, you shall not: I speak in the interest of your health."

"Well, then, doctor," she replies, with a smile, "if it is in the interest of my health, that is all the more reason why you should let me go out."

The excuse is a plausible one and even irresistible; but the husband, wishing to carry the struggle against destiny to the last, declares that he will accompany his wife. The doctor remains alone, feeling somewhat anxious, in spite of the rather farcical turn which the incident has taken. Suddenly, a piercing shriek is heard and the noise of a body falling. He runs out and finds Mme. —— wild with fright and apparently dying in her husband's arms. At the moment when, leaving him for an instant, she opened the door of the place where she was going, a rat, the first seen there for twenty years, rushed at her and gave her so great a start that she fell flat on her back. And all the rest

of the prediction was fulfilled to the letter, hour by hour and detail by detail.

3

To make it quite clear in what spirit I am undertaking this study and to remove at the beginning any suspicion of blind or systematic credulity, I am anxious, before going any further, to say that I fully realise that cases of this kind by no means carry conviction. It is quite possible that everything happened in the subconscious imagination of the subject and that she herself created, by self-suggestion her illness, her fright, her fall and her miscarriage and adapted herself to most of the circumstances which she had foretold in her secondary state. The appearance of the rat at the fatal moment is the only thing that would suggest a precise and disquieting vision of an inevitable future event. Unfortunately, we are not told that the rat was perceived by other witnesses than the patient, so that there is nothing to prove that it also was not imaginary. I have therefore quoted this inadequate instance only because it represents fairly well the general aspect and the indecisive value of many similar cases and enables us to note once and for all

the objections which can be raised and the precautions which we should take before entering these suspicious and obscure regions.

We now come to an infinitely more significant and less questionable case related by Dr Joseph Maxwell, the learned and very scrupulous author of *Les Phénomènes psychiques,* a work which has been translated into English under the title of *Metapsychical Phenomena.* It concerns a vision which was described to him eight days before the event and which he told to many people before it was accomplished. A sensitive perceived in a crystal the following scene: a large steamer, flying a flag of three horizontal bars, black, white and red, and bearing the name *Leutschland,* was sailing in mid-ocean; the boat was suddenly enveloped in smoke; a great number of sailors, passengers and men in uniform rushed to the upper deck; and the boat went down.

Eight days afterwards, the newspapers announced the accident to the *Deutschland,* whose boiler had burst, obliging the steamboat to stand to.

The evidence of a man like Dr. Maxwell, especi-

ally when we have to do with a so-to-speak personal incident, possesses an importance on which it is needless to insist. We have here, therefore, several days beforehand, the very clear prevision of an event which, moreover, in no way concerns the percipient: a curious detail, but one which is not uncommon in these cases. The mistake in reading *Leutschland* for *Deutschland,* which would have been quite natural in real life, adds a note of probability and authenticity to the phenomenon. As for the final act, the foundering of the vessel in the place of a simple heaving to, we must see in this, as Dr. J. W. Pickering and W. A. Sadgrove suggest, "the subconscious dramatisation of a subliminal inference of the percipient." Such dramatisations, moreover, are instinctive and almost general in this class of visions.

If this were an isolated case, it would certainly not be right to attach decisive importance to it; "but," Dr. Maxwell observes, "the same sensitive has given me other curious instances; and these cases, compared with others which I myself have observed or with those of which I have received first-hand accounts, render the hypothesis of coincidence

very improbable, though they do not absolutely exclude it." [1]

4

Another and perhaps more convincing case, more strictly investigated and established, a case which clearly does not admit of explanation by the theory of coincidence, worthy of all respect though this theory be, is that related by M. Théodore Flournoy, professor of science at the university of Geneva, in his remarkable work, *Esprits et médiums*. Professor Flournoy is known to be one of the most learned and critical exponents of the new science of metapsychics. He even carries his fondness for natural explanations and his repugnance to admit the interyention of superhuman powers to a point whither it is often difficult to follow him. I will give the narrative as briefly as possible. It will be found in full on pp. 348 to 362 of his masterly book.

In August, 1883, a certain Mme. Buscarlet, whom he knew personally, returned to Geneva after spending three years with the Moratief family at Kazan as governess to two girls. She continued to correspond with the family and also with a Mme. Nitchinof, who kept a school at Kazan to which

[1] Maxwell, *Metapsychical Phenomena*, p. 202.

Mlles. Moratief, Mme. Buscarlet's former pupils, went after her departure.

On the night of the 9th of December (O. S.) of the same year, Mme. Buscarlet had a dream which she described the following morning in a letter to Mme. Moratief, dated 10 December. She wrote, to quote her own words:

"You and I were on a country-road when a carriage passed in front of us and a voice from inside called to us. When we came up to the carriage, we saw Mlle. Olga Popoi lying across it, clothed in white, wearing a bonnet trimmed with yellow ribbons. She said to you:

" 'I called you to tell you that Mme. Nitchinof will leave the school on the 17th.'

"The carriage then drove on."

A week later and three days before the letter reached Kazan, the event foreseen in the dream was fulfilled in a tragic fashion. Mme. Nitchinof died on the 16th of an infectious disease; and on the 17th her body was carried out of the school for fear of infection.

It is well to add that both Mme. Buscharlet's letter and the replies which came from Russia were

communicated to Professor Flournoy and bear the postmark dates.

Such premonitory dreams are frequent; but it does not often happen that circumstances and especially the existence of a document dated previous to their fulfilment give them such incontestable authenticity.

We may remark in passing the odd character of this premonition. The date is fixed precisely; but only a veiled and mysterious allusion (the woman lying across the carriage and cloaked in white) is made to the essential part of the prediction, the illness and death. Was there a coincidence, a vision of the future pure and simple, or a vision of the future suggested by telepathic influence? The theory of coincidence can be defended, if need be, here as every elsewhere, but would be very extraordinary in this case. As for telepathic influence, we should have to suppose that, on the 9th of December, a week before her death, Mme. Nitchinof had in her subconsciousness a presentiment of her end and that she transmitted this presentment across some thousands of miles, from Kazan to Geneva, to a person with whom she had never been intimate. It is very complex but possible, for telepathy often has these

disconcerting ways. If this were so, the case would be one of latent illness or even of self-suggestion; and the pre-existence of the future, without being entirely disproved, would be less clearly established.

5

Let us pass to other examples. I quote from an excellent article on the importance of precognitions, by Messrs. Pickering and Sadgrove, which appeared in the *Annales des sciences psychiques* for 1 February 1908, the summary of an experiment by Mrs. A. W. Verrall told in full detail in Vol. XX. of the *Proceedings*. Mrs. Verrall is a celebrated "automatist;" and her "cross-correspondences" occupy a whole volume of the *Proceedings*. Her good faith, her sincerity, her fairness and her scientific precision are above suspicion; and she is one of the most active and respected members of the Society for Psychical Research.

On the 11th of May 1901, at 11.10 P.M., Mrs. Verrall wrote as follows:

"Do not hurry date this hoc est quod volui —tandem. δικαιοσύνη καὶ χαρὰ συμφωνεῖ συνετοῖσιν. A. W. V. καὶ ἄλλῳ τινὶ ἴσως. calx pedibus inhaerens difficultatem superavit. magnopere adiuvas

persectando semper. Nomen inscribere iam possum —sic, en tibi!" [1]

After the writing comes a humorous drawing representing a bird walking.

That same night, as there were said to be "uncanny happenings" in some rooms near the London Law Courts, the watchers arranged to sit through the night in the empty chambers. Precautions were taken to prevent intrusion and powdered chalk was spread on the floor of the two smaller rooms, "to trace anybody or anything that might come or go." Mrs. Verrall knew nothing of the matter. The phenomena began at 12.43 A.M. and ended at 2.9 A.M. The watchers noticed marks on the powdered chalk. On examination it was seen that the marks were "clearly defined bird's footprints in the middle of the floor, three in the left-hand room and five in the right-hand room." The marks were identical and exactly 2¾ inches in width; they might be compared to the foot-prints of a bird about the size

[1] Xenoglossy is well known not to be unusual in automatic writing; sometimes even the "automatist" speaks or writes languages of which he is completely ignorant. The Latin and Greek passages are translated as follows:

"This is what I have wanted, at last. Justice and joy speak a word to the wise. A. W. V. and perhaps some one else. Chalk sticklng to the feet has got over the difficulty. You help greatly by always persevering. Now I can write a name—thus, here it is!"

of a turkey. The foot-prints were observed at 2.30 A.M.; the unexplained phenomena had begun at 12.43 that same morning. The words about "chalk sticking to the feet" are a singularly appropriate comment on the events; but the remarkable point is that Mrs. Verrall wrote what we have said one hour and thirty-three minutes before the events took place.

The persons who watched in the two rooms were questioned by Mr. J. G. Piddington, a member of the council of the S. P. R., and declared that they had not any expectation of what they discovered. I need hardly add that Mrs. Verrall had never heard anything about the happenings in the haunted house and that the watchers were completely ignorant of Mrs. Verrall's existence.

Here then is a very curious prediction of an event, insignificant in itself, which is to happen, in a house unknown to the one who foretells it, to people whom she does not know either. The spiritualists, who score in this case, not without some reason, will have it that a spirit, in order to prove its existence and its intelligence, organised this little scene in which the future, the present and the past are all mixed up together. Are they right? Or is Mrs.

Verrall's subconsciousness roaming like this, at random, in the future? It is certain that the problem has seldom appeared under a more baffling aspect.

6

We will now take another premonitory dream, strictly controlled by the committee of the S. P. R.[1] Early in September 1893, Annette, wife of Walter Jones, tobacconist, of Old Gravel Lane, East London, had her little boy ill. One night she dreamt that she saw a cart drive up and stop near where she was. It contained three coffins, "two white and one blue. One white coffin was bigger than the other; and the blue was the biggest of the three." The driver took out the bigger white coffin and left it at the mother's feet, driving off with the others. Mrs. Jones told her dream to her husband and to a neighbour, laying particular stress on the curious circumstance that one of the coffins was blue.

On the 10th of September, a friend of Mr. and Mrs. Jones was confined of a boy, who died on the 20th of the same month. Their own little boy died on the following Monday, the 2nd of October, being then sixteen months old. It was decided to bury

[1] *Proceedings,* Vol. XI., p. 493.

the two children on the same day. On the morning of the day chosen, the parish priest informed Mr. and Mrs. Jones that another child had died in the neighbourhood and that its body would be brought into church along with the two others. Mrs. Jones remarked to her husband:

"If the coffin is blue, then my dream will come true. For the two other coffins were white."

The third coffin was brought; it was blue. It remains to be observed that the dimensions of the coffins corresponded exactly with the dream premonitions, the smallest being that of the child who died first, the next that of the little Jones boy, who was sixteen months old, and the largest, the blue one, that of a boy six years of age.

Let us take, more or less at random, another case from the inexhaustible *Proceedings*.[1] The report is written by Mr. Alfred Cooper and attested by the Duchess of Hamilton, the Duke of Manchester and another gentleman to whom the duchess related the incident before the fulfilment of the prophetic vision:

"A fortnight before the death of the late Earl of L——," says Mr. Cooper, "in 1882, I called upon

[1] *Proceedings*, Vol. XI., p. 505.

the Duke of Hamilton, in Hill Street, to see him professionally. After I had finished seeing him, we went into the drawing-room, where the duchess was, and the duke said to me:

" 'Oh, Cooper, how is the earl?'

"The duchess said, 'What earl?' and, on my answering, 'Lord L——,' she replied:

" 'That is very odd. I have had a most extraordinary vision. I went to bed, but, after being in bed a short time, I was not exactly asleep, but thought I saw a scene as if from a play before me. The actors in it were Lord L——, in a chair, as if in a fit, with a man standing over him with a red beard. He was by the side of a bath, over which bath a red lamp was distinctly shown.'

"I then said:

" 'I am attending Lord L—— at present; there is very little the matter with him; he is not going to die; he will be all right very soon.'

"Well, he got better for a week and was nearly well, but, at the end of six or seven days after this, I was called to see him suddenly. He had inflammation of both lungs.

"I called in Sir William Jenner, but in six days he was a dead man. There were two male nurses at-

tending on him; one had been taken ill. But, when I saw the other, the dream of the duchess was exactly represented. He was standing near a bath over the earl and, strange to say, his beard was red. There was the bath with the red lamp over it; and this brought the story to my mind.

"The vision seen by the duchess was told two weeks before the death of Lord L——. It is a most remarkable thing."

7

But it is impossible to find space for the many instances related. As I have said, there are hundreds of them, making their tracks in every direction across the plains of the future. Those which I have quoted give a sufficient idea of the predominating tone and the general aspect of this sort of story. It is nevertheless right to add that many of them are not at all tragic and that premonition opens its mysterious and capricious vistas of the future in connection with the most diverse and insignificant events. It cares but little for the human value of the occurrence and puts the vision of a number in a lottery on the same plane as the most dramatic death. The roads by which it reaches us are also unexpected and varied. Often, as in the examples

quoted, it comes to us in a dream. Sometimes, it is an auditory or visual hallucination which seizes upon us while awake; sometimes, an indefinable but clear and irresistible presentiment, a shapeless but powerful obsession, an absurd but imperative certainty which rises from the depths of our inner darkness, where perhaps lies hidden the final answer to every riddle.

One might illustrate each of these manifestations with numerous examples. I will mention only a few, selected not among the most striking or the most attractive, but among those which have been most strictly tested and investigated.[1] A young peasant from the neighbourhood of Ghent, two months before the drawing for the conscription, announces to all and sundry that he will draw number 90 from the urn. On entering the presence of the district-commissioner in charge, he asks if number 90 is still in. The answer is yes.

"Well, then, I shall have it!"

And to the general amazement, he does draw number 90.

Questioned as to the manner in which he acquired this strange certainty, he declares that, two months

[1] *Proceedings,* Vol. XI., p. 545.

ago, just after he had gone to bed, he saw a huge, indescribable form appear in a corner of his room with the number 90 standing out plainly in the middle, in figures the size of a man's hand. He sat up in bed and shut and opened his eyes to persuade himself that he was not dreaming. The apparition remained in the same place, distinctly and undeniably.

Professor Georges Hulin, of the university of Ghent, and M. Jules van Dooren, the district-commissioner, who report the incident, mention three other similar and equally striking cases witnessed by M. van Dooren during his term of office. I am the less inclined to doubt their declaration inasmuch as I am personally acquainted with them and know that their statements, as regards the objective reality of the facts, are so to speak equivalent to a legal deposition. M. Gozzano mentions some previsions which are quite as remarkable in connection with the gaming-tables at Monte Carlo.

I repeat, I am aware that, in the case of these occurrences and those which resemble them, it is possible once again to invoke the theory of coincidence. It will be contended that there are probably a thousand predictions of this kind which are never

talked about, because they were not fulfilled, whereas, if one of them is accomplished, which is bound by the law of probabilities to happen some day or other, the astonishment is general and free rein is given to the imagination. This is true; nevertheless, it is well to enquire whether these predictions are as frequent as is loosely stated. In the matter of those which concern the conscription-drawings, for instance, I have had the opportunity of interrogating more than one constant witness of these little dramas of fate; and all admitted that, on the whole, they are much rarer than one would believe. Next, we must not forget that there can be no question here of scientific proofs. We are in the midst of a slippery and nebulous region, where we would not dare to risk a step if we were not allowing ourselves to be guided by our feelings rather than by certainties which we are not forbidden to hope for, but which are not yet in sight.

8

We will abridge our subject still further, referring readers who wish to know the details to the originals, lest we should never have done; or rather, instead of attempting an abridgment, which would

still be too long, so plentiful are the materials, we will content ourselves with enumerating a few instances, all taken from Bozzano's *Des Phénomènes prémonitoires*. We read there of a funeral procession seen on a high-road several days before it actually passed that way; or, again, of a young mechanic who, in the beginning of November, dreamt that he came home at half-past five in the afternoon and saw his sister's little girl run over by a tram-car while crossing the street in front of the house. He told his dream, in great distress; and, on the 13th of the same month, in spite of all the precautions that had been taken, the child was run over by the tram-car and killed at the hour named. We find the ghost, the phantom animal or the mysterious noise which, in certain families, is the traditional herald of a death or of an imminent catastrophe. We find the celebrated vision which the painter Segantini had thirteen days before his decease, every detail of which remained in his mind and was represented in his last picture, *Death*. We find the Messina disaster clearly foreseen, twice over, by a little girl who perished under the ruins of the ill-fated city; and we read of a

dream which, three months before the French invasion of Russia, foretold to Countess Toutschkoff that her husband would fall at Borodino, a village so little known at the time that those interested in the dream looked in vain for its name on the maps.

Until now we have spoken only of the spontaneous manifestations of the future. It would seem as though coming events, gathered in front of our lives, bear with crushing weight upon the uncertain and deceptive dike of the present, which is no longer able to contain them. They ooze through, they seek a crevice by which to reach us. But side by side with these passive, independent and intractable premonitions, which are but so many vagrant and furtive emanations of the unknown, are others which do yield to entreaty, allow themselves to be directed into channels, are more or less obedient to our orders and will sometimes reply to the questions which we put to them. They come from the same inaccessible reservoir, are no less mysterious, but yet appear a little more human than the others; and, without drugging ourselves with puerile or dangerous illusions, we may be permitted to hope that, if we follow them and study

them attentively, they will one day open to us the hidden paths joining that which is no more to that which is not yet.

It is true that here, where we must needs mix with the somewhat lawless world of professional mystery-mongers, we have to increase our caution and walk with measured steps on very suspicious ground. But even in this region of pitfalls we glean a certain number of facts that cannot reasonably be contested. It will be enough to recall, for instance, the symbolic premonitions of the famous "seeress of Prevorst," Frau Hauffe, whose prophetic spirit was awakened by soap-bubbles, crystals and mirrors;[1] the clairvoyant who, eighteen years before the event, foretold the death of a girl by the hand of her rival in 1907, in a written prophecy which was presented to the court by the mother of the murdered girl;[2] the gipsy who, also in writing, foretold all the events in Miss Isabel Arundel's life, including the name of her husband, Burton the famous explorer;[3] the sealed letter

[1] A. J. C. Kerner, *Die Seherin von Prevorst.*

[2] *Light,* 1907, p. 219. The crime was committed in Paris and made a great stir at the time.

[3] Lady Burton, *The Life of Captain Sir Richd. F. Burton, K.C.M.G.,* Vol. I., p. 253.

addressed to M. Morin, vice-president of the Société du mesmerisme, describing the most unexpected circumstances of a death that occurred a month later;[1] the famous "Marmontel prediction," obtained by Mrs. Verrall's cross-correspondences, which gives a vision, two months and a half before their accomplishment, of the most insignificant actions of a traveller in an hotel bedroom;[2] and many others.

9

I will not review the various and very often grotesque methods of interrogating the future that are most frequently practised to-day: cards, palmistry, crystal-gazing, fortune-telling by means of coffee-grounds, tea-leaves, magnetic needles and white of egg, graphology, astrology and the rest. These methods are worth exactly what the medium who employs them is worth. They have no other object than to arouse the medium's subconsciousness and to bring it into relation with that of the person questioning him. As a matter of fact, all these purely empirical processes are but so many, often puerile forms of self-manifestation adopted by the

[1] *Journal of the Society for the Psychical Research*, Vol. IX., p. 15.
[2] *Proceedings*. Vol. XX., p. 331.

undeniable gift which is known as intuition, clairvoyance or, in certain cases, psychometry. I have written at length, in my volume entitled *The Unknown Guest,* of this last faculty and need not linger over it now. All that we have still to do is to consider it for a moment in its relations with the foretelling of the future.

A large number of investigations, notably those conducted by M. Duchatel and Dr. Osty, show that, in psychometry, the notion of time, as Dr. Joseph Maxwell observes, is very loose, that is to say, the past, present and future nearly always overlap. Most of the clairvoyant or psychometric subjects, when they are honest, do not know, "do not feel," as M. Duchatel very ably remarks, "what the future is. They do not distinguish it from the other tenses; and consequently they succeed in being prophets, but unconscious prophets." In a word —and this is a very important indication from the point of view of the probable coexistence of the three tenses—it appears that they see that which is not yet with the same clearness and on the same plane as that which is no more, but are incapable of separating the two visions and picking out the future which alone interests us. For a still stronger

reason, it is impossible for them to state dates with precision. Nevertheless, the fact remains that, when we take the trouble to sift their evidence and have the patience to await the realisation of certain events which are sometimes not due for a long time to come, the future is fairly often perceived by some of these strange soothsayers.

There are psychometers, however, and notably Mme. M——, Dr. Osty's favourite medium, who never confuse the future and the past. Mme. M—— places her visions in time according to the position which they occupy in space. Thus she sees the future in front of her, the past behind her and the present beside her. But, notwithstanding, these distinctly-graded visions, she also is incapable of naming her dates exactly; in fact, her mistakes in this respect are so general that Dr. Osty looks upon it as a pure chronological coincidence when a prediction is realised at the moment foretold.

We should also observe that, in psychometry, only those events can be perceived which relate directly to the individual communicating with the percipient, for it is not so much the percipient that sees into us as we that read in our own subconsciousness, which is momentarily lighted by his presence.

We must not therefore ask him for predictions of a general character, whether, for instance, there will be a war in the spring, an epidemic in the summer or an earthquake in the autumn. The moment the question concerns events, however important, with which we are not intimately connected, he is bound to answer, as do all the genuine mediums, that he sees nothing.

The area of his vision being thus limited, does he really discover the future in it? After three years of numerous, cautious and systematic experiments with some twenty mediums, Dr. Osty categorically declares that he does:

"All the incidents," he says, "which filled these three years of my life, whether wished for by me or not, or even, absolutely contrary to the ordinary routine of my life, had always been foretold to me, not all by each of the clairvoyant subjects, but all by one or other of them. As I have been practising these tests continually, it seems to me that the experience of three years wholly devoted to this object should give some weight to my opinion on the subject of predictions."

This is incontestable; and the sincerity, scientific conscientiousness and high intellectual value of Dr.

Osty's fine work inspire one with the utmost confidence. Unfortunately, he contents himself with quoting too summarily a few facts and does not, as he ought, give us *in extenso* the details of his experiments, controls and tests. I am well aware that this would be a thankless and wearisome task, necessitating a large volume which a mass of puerile incidents and inevitable repetitions would make almost unreadable. Moreover, it could scarcely help taking the form of an intimate and indiscreet autobiography; and it is not easy to bring one's self to make this sort of public confession. But it has to be done. In a science which is only in its early stages, it is not enough to show the object attained and to state one's conviction; it is necessary above all to describe every path that has been taken and, by an incessant and infinite accumulation of investigated and attested facts, to enable every one to draw his own conclusions. This has been the cumbrous and laborious method of the *Proceedings* for over thirty years; and it is the only right one. Discussion is possible and fruitful only at that price. In all these extra-conscious matters, we have not yet reached the stage of definite deductions, we are

still bringing up materials to the scene of operations.

Once more, I know that, in these cases, as I have seen for myself, the really convincing facts are necessarily very rare; indeed, no elsewhere do we meet with the same difficulty. If the medium tells you, for instance, as Mme. M—— seems easily to do, how you will employ your day from the morning onwards, if she sees you in a certain house in a certain street meeting this or that person, it is impossible to say that, on the one hand, she is not already reading your as yet unconscious plans or intentions, or that, on the other hand, by doing what she has foreseen, you are not obeying a suggestion against which you could not fight except by violently doing the opposite to what it demands of you, which again would be a case of inverted suggestion. None therefore would have any value save predictions of unlikely happenings, clearly defined and outside the sphere of the person interested. As Dr. Osty says:

"The ideal prognostication would obviously be that of an event so rare, so sudden and unexpected, implying such a change in one's mode of life that the theory of coincidence could not decently be

put forward. But, as everybody is not, in the peaceful course of his existence, threatened by such an absolutely convincing event, the clairvoyant cannot always reveal to the person experimenting—and reveal for a more or less approximate date—one of those incidents whose accomplishment would carry irresistible conviction."

In any case, the question of psychometric prognostications calls for further enquiry, though it is easy even at the present day to foresee the results.

10

Let us now return to our spontaneous premonitions, in which the future comes to seek us of its own accord and, so to speak, to challenge us at home. I know from personal experience that when we embark upon these disconcerting matters the first impression is scarcely favourable. We are very much inclined to laugh, to treat as wearisome tales, as hysterical hallucinations, as ingenious or interested fictions most of the incidents that give too violent a shock to the narrow and limited idea which we have of our human life. To smile, to reject everything beforehand and to pass by with averted head, as was done, remember, in the time

of Galvani and in the early days of hypnotism, is much more easy and seems more respectable and prudent than to stop, admit and examine. Nevertheless we must not forget that it is to some who did not smile so lightly that we owe the best part of the marvels from whose heights we are preparing to smile in our turn. For the rest, I grant that, thus presented, hastily and summarily, without the details that throw light upon them and the proofs that support them, the incidents in question do not show to advantage and, inasmuch as they are isolated and sparingly chosen, lose all the weight and authority derived from the compact and imposing mass whence they are arbitrarily detached. As I said above, nearly a thousand cases have been collected, representing probably not the tenth part of those which a more active and general search might bring together. The number is evidently of importance and denotes the enormous pressure of the mystery; but, if there were only half a dozen genuine cases—and Dr. Maxwell's, Professor Flournoy's, Mrs. Verrall's, the Marmontel, Jones and Hamilton cases and some others are undoubtedly genuine—they would be enough to show that, under the erroneous idea which we form of the past

and the present, a new verity is living and moving, eager to come to light.

The efforts of that verity, I need hardly say, display a very different sort of force after we have actually and attentively read those hundreds of extraordinary stories which, without appearing to do so; strike to the very roots of history. We soon lose all inclination to doubt. We penetrate into another world and come to a stop all out of countenance. We no longer know where we stand; before and after overlap and mingle. We no longer distinguish the insidious and factitious but indispensable line which separates the years that have gone by from the years that are to come. We clutch at the hours and days of the past and present to reassure ourselves, to fasten on to some certainty, to convince ourselves that we are still in our right place in this life where that which is not yet seems as substantial, as real, as positive, as powerful as that which is no more. We discover with uneasiness that time, on which we based our whole existence, itself no longer exists. It is no longer the swiftest of our gods, known to us only by its flight across all things; it alters its position no more than space, of which it is doubtless but the incomprehen-

sible reflex. It reigns in the centre of every event; and every event is fixed in its centre; and all that comes and all that goes passes from end to end of our little life without moving by a hair's breadth around its motionless pivot. It is entitled to but one of the thousand names which we have been wont to lavish upon its power, a power that seemed to us manifold and innumerable: "yesterday," "recently," "formerly," "erewhile," "after," "before," "to-morrow," "soon," "never," "later" fall like childish masks, whereas "to-day" and "always" completely cover with their united shadows the idea which we form in the end of a duration which has no subdivisions, no breaks and no stages, but is pulseless, motionless and boundless.

II

Many are the theories which men have imagined in their attempts to explain the working of the strange phenomenon; and many others might be imagined.

As we have seen, self-suggestion and telepathy explain certain cases which concern events already in existence but still latent and perceived before the knowledge of them can reach us by the normal process of the senses or the intelligence. But, even

by extending these two theories to their uttermost point and positively abusing their accommodating elasticity, we do not succeed in illumining by their aid more than a rather restricted portion of the vast undiscovered land. We must therefore look for something else.

The first theory which suggests itself and which on the surface seems rather attractive is that of theory and other religious suppositions. It is scarcely distinguishable from the theosophical theory and other religious suppositions. It assumes the survival of spirits, the existence of discarnate or other superior and more mysterious entities which surround us, interest themselves in our fate, guide our thoughts and our actions and, above all, know the future. It is, as we recognise when we speak of ghosts and haunted houses, a very acceptable theory; and any one to whom it appeals can adopt it without doing violence to his intelligence. But we must confess that it seems less necessary and perhaps even less clearly proved in this region than in that. It starts by begging the question: without the intervention of discarnate beings, the spiritualists tell us, it is impossible to explain the majority of the premonitory pheno-

mena; therefore we must admit the existence of these discarnate beings. Let us grant it for the moment, for to beg the question, which is merely an indefensible trick of the superficial logic of our brain, does not necessarily condemn a theory and neither takes away from nor adds to the reality of things. Besides, as we shall insist later, the intervention or non-intervention of the spirits is not the point at issue; and the crux of the mystery does not lie there. What must interest us is far less the paths or intermediaries by which prophetic warnings reach us than the actual existence of the future in the present. It is true—to do complete justice to neospiritualism—that its position offers certain advantages from the point of view of the almost inconceivable problem of the pre-existence of the future. It can evade or divert some of the consequences of that problem. The spirits, it declares, do not necessarily see the future as a whole, as a total past or present, motionless and immovable, but they know infinitely better than we do the numberless causes that determine any agent, so, finding themselves at the luminous source of those causes, they have no difficulty in foreseeing their effects. They are, with respect to the incidents still in pro-

cess of formation, in the position of an astronomer who foretells, within a second, all the phases of an eclipse in which a savage sees nothing but an unprecedented catastrophe which he attributes to the anger of his idols of straw or clay. It is indeed possible that this acquaintance with a greater number of causes explains certain predictions; but there are plenty of others which presume a knowledge of so many causes, causes so remote and so profound, that this knowledge is hardly to be distinguished from a knowledge of the future pure and simple. In any case, beyond certain limits, the pre-existence of causes seems no clearer than that of effects. Nevertheless it must be admitted that the spiritualists gain a slight advantage here.

They believe that they gain another when they say or might say that it is still possible that the spirits stimulate us to realise the events which they foretell without themselves clearly perceiving them in the future. After announcing, for instance, that on a certain day we shall go to a certain place and do a certain thing, they urge us irresistibly to proceed to the spot named and there to perform the act prophesied. But this theory, like those of self-suggestion and telepathy, would explain only

a few phenomena and would leave in obscurity all those cases, infinitely more numerous because they make up almost the whole of our future, in which either chance intervenes or some event in no way dependent upon our will or the spirit's, unless indeed we suppose that the latter possesses an omniscience and an omnipotence which takes us back to the original mysteries of the problem.

Besides, in the gloomy regions of precognition, it is almost always a matter of anticipating a misfortune, and very rarely, if ever, of meeting with a pleasure or a joy. We should therefore have to admit that the spirits which drag me to the fatal place and compel me to do the act that will have tragic consequences are deliberately hostile to me and find diversion only in the spectacle of my suffering. What could those spirits be, from what evil world would they arise and how should we explain why our brothers and friends of yesterday, after passing through the august and peace-bestowing gates of death, suddenly become transformed into crafty and malevolent demons? Can the great spiritual kingdom, in which all passions born of the flesh should be stilled, be but a dismal abode of hatred, spite and envy? It will perhaps be said

that they lead us into misfortune in order to purify us; but this brings us to religious theories which it is not our intention to examine.

12

The only attempt at an explanation that can hold its own with spiritualism has recourse once again to the mysterious powers of our subconsciousness. We must needs recognise that, if the future exists today, already such as it will be when it becomes for us the present and the past, the intervention of discarnate minds or of any other spiritual entity adrift from another sphere is of little avail. We can picture an infinite spirit indifferently contemplating the past and future in their co-existence; we can imagine a whole hierarchy of intermediate intelligences taking a more or less extensive part in the contemplation and transmitting it to our subconsciousness. But all this is practically nothing more than inconsistent speculation and ingenious dreaming in the dark; in any case, it is adventitious, secondary and provisional. Let us keep to the facts as we see them: an unknown faculty, buried deep in our being and generally inactive, perceives,

on rare occasions, events that have not yet taken place. We possess but one certainty on this subject, namely, that the phenomenon actually occurs within ourselves; it is therefore within ourselves that we must first study it, without burdening ourselves with suppositions which remove it from its centre and simply shift the mystery. The incomprehensible mystery is the pre-existence of the future; once we admit this—and it seems very difficult to deny—there is no reason to attribute to imaginary intermediaries rather than to ourselves the faculty of descrying certain fragments of that future. We see, in regard to most of the mediumistic manifestations, that we possess within ourselves all the unusual forces with which the spiritualists endow discarnate spirits; and why should it be otherwise as concerns the powers of divination? The explanation taken from the subconsciousness is the most direct, the simplest, and the nearest, whereas the other is endlessly circuitous, complicated and distant. Until the spirits testify to their existence in an unanswerable fashion, there is no advantage in seeking in the grave for the solution of a riddle that appears indeed to lie at the roots of our own life.

13

It is true that this explanation does not explain much; but the others are just as ineffectual and are open to the same objections. These objections are many and various; and it is easier to raise them than to reply to them. For instance, we can ask ourselves why the subconsciousness or the spirits, seeing that they read the future and are able to announce an impending calamity, hardly ever give us the one useful and definite indication that would allow us to avoid it. What can be the childish or mysterious reason of this strange reticence? In many cases it is almost criminal; for instance, in a case related by Professor Hyslop [1] we see the foreboding of the greatest misfortune that can befall a mother germinating, growing, sending out shoots, developing, like some gluttonous and deadly plant, to stop short on the verge of the last warning, the one detail, insignificant in itself but indispensable, which would have saved the child. It is the case of a woman who begins by experiencing a vague but powerful impression that a grievous "burden" is going to fall upon her family. Next month, this premonitory feeling repeats itself very frequently,

[1] *Proceedings*, Vol. XIV., p. 266.

becomes more intense and ends by concentrating itself upon the poor woman's little daughter. Each time that she is planning something for the child's future, she hears a voice saying:

"She'll never need it."

A week before the catastrophe, a violent smell of fire fills the house. From that time the mother begins to be careful about matches, seeing that they are in safe places and out of reach. She looks all over the house for them and feels a strong impulse to burn all matches of the kind easily lighted. About an hour before the fatal disaster, she reaches for a box to destroy it; but she says to herself that her eldest boy is gone out, thinks that she may need the matches to light the gas-stove and decides to destroy them as soon as he comes back. She takes the child up to its crib for its morning sleep and, as she is putting it into the cradle, she hears the usual mysterious voice whisper in her ear:

"Turn the mattress."

But, being in a great hurry, she simply says that she will turn the mattress after the child has taken its nap. She then goes downstairs to work. After a while, she hears the child cry and, hurrying up to the room, finds the crib and its bedding on fire

and the child so badly burnt that it dies in three hours.

14

Before going further and theorising about this case, let us once more state the matter precisely. I know that the reader may straightway and quite legitimately deny the value of anecdotes of this kind. He will say that we have to do with a neurotic who has drawn upon her imagination for all the elements that give a dramatic setting to the story and surround with a halo of mystery a sad but commonplace domestic accident. This is quite possible; and it is perfectly allowable to dismiss the case. But it is none the less true that, by thus deliberately rejecting everything that does not bear the stamp of mathematical or judicial certainty, we risk losing, as we go along, most of the opportunities or clues which the great riddle of this world offers us in its moments of inattention or graciousness. At the beginning of an enquiry we must know how to content ourselves with little. For the incident in question to be convincing, previous evidence in writing, more or less official statements, would be required, whereas we have only the declarations of the husband, a neighbour and a sister.

This is insufficient, I agree; but we must at the same time confess that the circumstances are hardly favourable to obtaining the proofs which we demand. Those who receive warnings of this kind either believe in them or do not believe in them. If they believe in them, it is quite natural that they should not think first of all of the scientific interest of their trouble, or of putting down in writing and thus authenticating its premonitory symptoms and gradual evolution. If they do not believe in them, it is no less natural that they should not proceed to speak or take notice of inanities of which they do not recognise the value until after they have lost the opportunity of supplying convincing proofs of them. Also, do not forget that the little story in question is selected from among a hundred others, which in their turn are equally indecisive, but which, repeating the same facts and the same tendencies with a strange persistency, end by weakening the most inveterate distrust.

15

Having said this much, in order to conciliate or part company with those who have no intention of leaving the *terra firma* of science, let us return to the case before us, which is all the more disquieting

inasmuch as we may consider it a sort of prototype of the tragic and almost diabolical reticence which we find in most premonitions. It is probable that under the mattress there was a stray match which the child discovered and struck; this is the only possible explanation of the catastrophe, for there was no fire burning on that floor of the house. If the mother had turned the mattress, she would have seen the match; and, on the other hand, she would certainly have turned the mattress if she had been told that there was a match underneath it. Why did the voice that urged her to perform the necessary action not add the one word that was capable of ensuring that action? The problem moreover is equally perturbing and perhaps equally insoluble whether it concern our own subconscious faculties, or spirits, or strange intelligences. Those who give these warnings must know that they will be useless, because they manifestly foresee the event as a whole; but they must also know that one last word, which they do not pronounce, would be enough to prevent the misfortune that is already consummated in their prevision. They know it so well that they bring this word to the very edge of the abyss, hold it suspended there, almost let it fall and re-

capture it suddenly at the moment when its weight would have caused happiness and life to rise once more to the surface of the mighty gulf. What then is this mystery? Is it incapacity or hostility? If they are incapable, what is the unexpected and sovran force that interposes between them and us? And, if they are hostile, on what, on whom are they revenging themselves? What can be the secret of those inhuman games, of those uncanny and cruel diversions on the most slippery and dangerous peaks of fate? Why warn, if they know that the warning will be in vain? Of whom are they making sport? Is there really an inflexible fatality by virtue of which that which has to be accomplished is accomplished from all eternity? But then why not respect silence, since all speech is useless? Or do they, in spite of all, perceive a gleam, a crevice in the inexorable wall? What hope do they find in it? Have they not seen more clearly than ourselves that no deliverance can come through that crevice? One could understand this fluttering and wavering, all these efforts of theirs, if they did not know; but here it is proved that they know everything, since they foretell exactly that which they might prevent. If we press them with questions,

they answer that there is nothing to be done, that no human power could avert or thwart the issue. Are they mad, bored, irritable or accessory to a hideous pleasantry? Does our fate depend on the happy solution of some petty enigma or childish conundrum, even as our salvation, in most of the so-called revealed religions, is settled by a blind and stupid cast of the die? Is all the liberty that we are granted reduced to the reading of a more or less ingenious riddle? Can the great soul of the universe be the soul of a great baby?

16

But, rather than pursue this subject, let us be just and admit that there is perhaps no way out of the maze and that our reproaches are as incomprehensible as the conduct of the spirits. Indeed, what would you have them do in the circle in which our logic imprisons them? Either they foretell us a calamity which their predictions cannot avert, in which case there is no use in foretelling it, or, if they announce it to us and at the same time give us the means to prevent it, they do not really see the future and are foretelling nothing, since the calam-

ity is not to take place, with the result that their action seems equally absurd in both cases.

It is obvious: to whichever side we turn, we find nothing but the incomprehensible. On the one hand, the pre-established, unshakable, unalterable future which we have called destiny, fatality or what you will, which suppresses man's entire independence and liberty of action and which is the most inconceivable and the dreariest of mysteries; on the other, intelligence apparently superior to our own, since they know what we do not, which, while aware that their intervention is always useless and very often cruel, nevertheless come harassing us with their sinister and ridiculous predictions. Must we resign ourselves once more to living with our eyes shut and our reason drowned in the boundless ocean of darkness; and is there no outlet?

17

For the moment, we will not linger in the dark regions of fatality, which is the supreme mystery, the desolation of every effort and every thought of man. What is clearest amid this incomprehensibility is that the spiritualistic theory, at first sight the most seductive, declares itself, on examination,

the most difficult to justify. We will also once more put aside the theosophical theory, or any other which assumes a divine intention and which might, to a certain extent, explain the hesitations and anguish of the prophetic warning, at the cost, however, of other puzzles, a thousand times as hard to solve, which nothing authorises us to substitute for the actual puzzle, formless and infinite, presented to our uninitiated vision.

When all is said, it is perhaps only in the theory which attributes those premonitions to our subconsciousness that we are able to find, if not a justification, at least a sort of explanation of that formidable reticence. They accord fairly well with the strange, inconsistent, whimsical and disconcerting character of the unknown entity within us that seems to live on nothing but nondescript fare borrowed from worlds to which our intelligence as yet has no access. It lives under our reason, in a sort of invisible and perhaps eternal palace, like a casual, unknown guest, dropped from another planet, whose interests, ideas, habits, passions have naught in common with ours. If it seems to have notions on the hereafter that are infinitely wider and more precise than those which we possess, it has only very vague no-

tions on the practical needs of our existence. It ignores us for years, absorbed no doubt with the numberless relations which it maintains with all the mysteries of the universe; and, when suddenly it remembers us, thinking apparently to please us, it makes an enormous, miraculous, but at the same time clumsy and superfluous movement, which upsets all that we believed we knew, without teaching us anything. Is it making fun of us, is it jesting, is it amusing itself, is it facetious, teasing, arch, or simply sleepy, bewildered, inconsistent, absent-minded? In any case, it is rather remarkable that it evidently dislikes to make itself useful. It readily performs the most glamorous feats of sleight-of-hand, provided that we can derive no profit from them. It lifts tables, moves the heaviest articles, produces flowers and hair, sets strings vibrating, gives life to inanimate objects and passes through solid matter, conjures up ghosts, subjugates time and space, creates light; but all, it seems, on one condition, that its performances should be without rhyme or reason and keep to the province of supernaturally vain and puerile recreations. The case of the divining-rod is almost the only one in which it lends us any regular assistance, this being a sort

of game, of no great importance, in which it appears to take pleasure. Sometimes, to say all that can be said, it consents to cure certain ailments, cleanses an ulcer, closes a wound, heals a lung, strengthens or unstiffens an arm or leg, or even sets bones, but always as it were by accident, without reason, method or object, in a deceitful, illogical and preposterous fashion. One would set it down as a spoilt child that has been allowed to lay hands on the most tremendous secrets of heaven and earth; it has no suspicion of their power, jumbles them all up—and turns them—into paltry, inoffensive toys. It knows everything, perhaps, but is ignorant of the uses of its knowledge. It has its arms laden with treasures which it scatters in the wrong manner and at the wrong time, giving bread to the thirsty and water to the hungry, overloading those who refuse and stripping the suppliant bare, pursuing those who flee from it and fleeing from those who pursue it. Lastly, even at its best moments, it behaves as though the fate of the being in whose depths it dwells interested it hardly at all, as though it had but an insignificant share in his misfortunes, feeling assured, one might almost think, of an independent and endless existence.

It is not surprising therefore, when we know its habits, that its communications on the subject of the future should be as fantastic as the other manifestations of its knowledge or its power. Let us add, to be quite fair, that, in those warnings which we would wish to see efficacious, it stumbles against the same difficulties as the spirits or other alien intelligences uselessly foretelling the event which they cannot prevent, or annihilating the event by the very fact of foretelling it.

18

And now, to end the question, is this unknown guest of ours alone responsible? Does it explain itself badly or do we not understand it? When we look into the matter closely, there is, under those anomalous and confused manifestations, in spite of efforts which we feel to be enormous and persevering, a sort of incapacity for self-expression and action which is bound to attract our attention. Is our conscious and individual life separated by impenetrable worlds from our subconscious and probably universal life? Does our unknown guest speak an unknown language and do the words which it speaks and which we think that we understand disclose its thought? Is every direct road pitilessly

barred and is there nothing left to it but narrow, closed paths, in which the best of what it had to reveal to us is lost? Is this the reason why it seeks those odd, childish, roundabout ways of automatic writing, cross-correspondence, symbolic premonition and all the rest? Yet, in the typical case which we have quoted, it seems to speak quite easily and plainly when it says to the mother:

"Turn the mattress."

If it can utter this sentence, why should it find it difficult or impossible to add:

"You will there find the matches that will set fire to the curtains."

What forbids it to do so and closes its mouth at the decisive moment? We relapse into the everlasting question: if it cannot complete the second sentence because it would be destroying in the womb the very event which it is foretelling, why does it utter the first?

19

But it is well, in spite of everything, to seek an explanation of the inexplicable; it is by attacking it on every side, at all hazards, that we cherish the hope of overcoming it; and we may therefore say to ourselves that our subconsciousness, when it

warns us of a calamity that is about to befall us, knowing all the future as it does, necessarily knows that the calamity is already accomplished. As our conscious and unconscious lives blend in it, it distresses itself and flutters around our overconfident ignorance. It tries to inform us, through nervousness, through pity, so as to mitigate the lightning cruelty of the blow. It speaks all the words that can prepare us for its coming, define it and identify it; but it is unable to say those which would prevent it from coming, seeing that it has come, that it is already present and perhaps past, manifest, ineffaceable, on another plane than that on which we live, the only plane which we are capable of perceiving. It finds itself, in a word, in the position of the man who, in the midst of peaceful, happy and unsuspecting folk, alone knows some bad news. He is neither able nor willing to announce it nor yet to hide it completely. He hesitates, delays, makes more or less transparent allusions, but refrains from saying the last word that would, so to speak, let loose the catastrophe in the hearts of the people around him, for to those who do not know of it the catastrophe is still as though it were not there. Our subconsciousness, in that instance, would act to-

wards the future as we act towards the past, the two conditions being identical, so much so that it often confuses them. It is of course impossible for us, at the stage which we have reached, to understand this confusion or this co-existence of the past, the present and the future; but that is no reason for denying it; on the contrary, what man understands least is probably that which most nearly approaches the truth.

20

Lastly, to complicate the question, it may be very justly objected that, though premonitions in general are useless and appear systematically to withhold the only indispensable and decisive words, there are, nevertheless, some that often seem to save those who obey them. These, it is true, are rarer than the first, but still they include a certain number that are well-authenticated. It remains to be seen how far they imply a knowledge of the future.

Here, for instance, is a traveller who, arriving at night in a small unknown town and walking along the ill-lighted dock in the direction of an hotel of which he roughly knows the position, at a given moment feels an irresistible impulse to turn and go

the other way. He instantly obeys, though his reason protests and "berates him for a fool" in taking a roundabout way to his destination. The next day he discovers that, if he had gone a few feet farther, he would certainly have slipped into the river; and, as he was but a feeble swimmer, he would just as certainly, being alone and unaided in the extreme darkness, have been downed.[1]

But is this a prevision of an event? No, for no event is to take place. There is simply an abnormal perception of the proximity of some unknown water and consequently of an imminent danger, an unexplained but fairly frequent subliminal sensitiveness. In a word, the problem of the future is not raised in this case, nor in any of the numerous cases that resemble it.

Here is another which evidently belongs to the same class, though at first sight it seems to postulate the pre-existence of a fatal event and a vision of the future corresponding exactly with a vision of the past. A traveller in South America is descending a river in a canoe; the party are just about to run close to a promontory when a sort of mysterious voice, which he has already heard at different mo-

[1] *Proceedings*, Vol. XI., p. 422.

mentous times of his life, imperiously orders him immediately to cross the river and gain the other shore as quickly as possible. This appears so absurd that he is obliged to threaten the Indians with death to force them to take this course. They have scarcely crossed more than half the river when the promontory falls at the very place where they meant to round it.[1]

The perception of imminent danger is here, I admit, even more abnormal than in the previous example, but it comes under the same heading. It is a phenomenon of subliminal hypersensitiveness observed more than once, a sort of premonition induced by subconscious perceptions, which has been christened by the barbarous name of "cryptæsthesia." But the interval between the moment when the peril is signalled and that at which it is consummated is too short for those questions which relate to a knowledge or a pre-existence of the future to arise in this instance.

The case is almost the same with the adventure of an American dentist, very carefully investigated by Dr. Hodgson. The dentist was bending over a bench on which was a little copper in which he

[1] Flournoy, *Esprits et médiums*, p. 316.

was vulcanising some rubber, when he heard a voice calling, in a quick and imperative manner, these words:

"Run to the window, quick! Run to the window, quick!"

He at once ran to the window and looked out to the street below, when suddenly he heard a tremendous report and, looking round, saw that the copper had exploded, destroying a great part of the workroom.[1]

Here again, a subconscious cautiousness was probably aroused by certain indications imperceptible to our ordinary senses. It is even possible that there exists between things and ourselves a sort of sympathy or subliminal communion which makes us experience the trials and emotions of matter that has reached the limits of its existence, unless, as is more likely, there is merely a simple coincidence between the chance idea of a possible explosion and its realisation.

A last and rather more complicated case is that of Jean Dupré, the sculptor, who was driving alone with his wife along a mountain road, skirting a

[1] *Proceedings*, Vol. XI., p. 424.

perpendicular cliff. Suddenly they both heard a voice that seemed to come from the mountain crying:

"Stop!"

They turned round, and saw nobody and continued their road. But the cries were repeated again and again, without anything to reveal the presence of a human being amid the solitude. At last the sculptor alighted and saw that the left wheel of the carriage, which was grazing the edge of the precipice, had lose its linch-pin and was on the point of leaving the axle-tree, which would almost inevitably have hurled the carriage into the abyss.

Need we, even here, relinquish the theory of subconscious perceptions? Do we know and can the author of the anecdote, whose good faith is not in question, tell us that certain unperceived circumstances, such as the grating of the wheel or the swaying of the carriage, did not give him the first alarm? After all, we know how easily stories of this kind involuntarily take a dramatic turn even at the actual moment and especially afterwards.

21

These examples—and there are many more of a similar kind—are enough, I think, to illustrate this

class of premonitions. The problem in these cases is simpler than when it relates to fruitless warnings; at least it is simpler so long as we do not bring into discussion the question of spirits, of unknown intelligences, or of an actual knowledge of the future; otherwise the same difficulty reappears and the warning, which this time seems efficacious, is in reality just as vain. In fact, the mysterious entity which knows that the traveller will go to the water's edge, that the wheel will be on the point of leaving the axle, that the copper will explode, or that the promontory will fall at a precise moment, must at the same time know that the traveller will not take the last fatal step, that the carriage will not be overturned, that the copper will not hurt anybody and that the canoe will pull away from the promontory. It is inadmissible that, seeing one thing, it will not see the other, since everything happens at the same point, in the course of the same second. Can we say that, if it had not given warning, the little saving movement would not have been executed? How can we imagine a future which, at one and the same time, has parts that are steadfast and others that are not? If it is foreseen that the promontory will fall and that the traveller will escape,

thanks to the supernatural warning, it is necessarily foreseen that the warning will be given; and, if so, what is the point of this futile comedy? I see no reasonable explanation of it in the spiritist or spiritualistic theory, which postulates a complete knowledge of the future, at least at a settled point and moment. On the other hand, if we adhere to the theory of a subliminal consciousness, we find there an explanation which is quite worthy of acceptation. This subliminal consciousness, though, in the majority of cases, it has no clear and comprehensive vision of the immediate future, can nevertheless possess an intuition of imminent danger, thanks to indications that escape our ordinary perception. It can also have a partial, intermittent and so to speak flickering vision of the future event and, if doubtful, can risk giving an incoherent warning, which, for that matter, will change nothing in that which already is.

22

In conclusion, let us state once more that fruitful premonitions necessarily annihilate events in the bud and consequently work their own destruction, so that any control becomes impossible. They would have an existence only if they prophesied a

general event which the subject would not escape but for the warning. If they had said to any one intending to go to Messina two or three months before the catastrophe, "Don't go, for the town will be destroyed before the month is out," we should have an excellent example. But it is a remarkable thing that genuine premonitions of this kind are very rare and nearly always rather indefinite in regard to events of a general order. In M. Bozzano's excellent collection, which is a sort of compendium of premonitory phenomena, the only pretty clear cases are nos. clv. and clviii., both of which are taken from the *Journal of the S.P.R.* In the first,[1] a mother sent a servant to bring home her little daughter, who had already left the house with the intention of going through the "railway garden," a strip of ground between the sea-wall and the railway-embankment, in order to sit on the great stones by the seaside and see the trains pass by. A few minutes after the little girl's departure, the mother had distinctly and repeatedly heard a voice within her say:

"Send for her back, or something dreadful will happen to her."

[1] *Journal,* Vol. VIII., p. 45.

Now, soon after, a train ran off the line and the engine and tender fell, breaking through the protecting wall and crashing down on the very stones where the child was accustomed to sit.

In the other case,[1] into which Professor W. F. Barrettmadea special enquiry, Captain MacGowan was in Brooklyn with his two boys, then on their holidays. He promised the boys that he would take them to the theatre and booked seats on the previous day; but on the day of the proposed visit he heard a voice within him constantly saying:

"Do not go to the theatre; take the boys back to school."

He hesitated, gave up his plan and resumed it again. But the words kept repeating themselves and impressing themselves upon him; and, in the end, he definitely decided not to go, much to the two boys' disgust. That night, the theatre was destroyed by fire, with a loss of three hundred lives.

We may add to this the prevision of the Battle of Borodino, to which I have already alluded. I will give the story in fuller detail, as told in the journal of Stephen Grellet the Quaker.

About three months before the French army en-

[1] *Journal,* Vol. I., p. 283.

tered Russia, the wife of General Toutschkoff dreamt that she was at an inn in a town unknown to her and that her father came into her room, holding her only son by the hand, and said to her, in a pitiful tone:

"Your happiness is at an end. He"—meaning Countess Toutschkoff's husband—"has fallen. He has fallen at Borodino."

The dream was repeated a second and a third time. Her anguish of mind was such that she awoke her husband and asked him:

"Where is Borodino?"

They looked for the name on the map and did not find it.

Before the French armies reached Moscow, Count Toutschkoff was placed at the head of the army of reserve; and one morning her father, holding her son by the hand, entered her room at the inn where she was staying. In great distress, as she had beheld him in her dream, he cried out:

"He has fallen. He has fallen at Borodino."

Then she saw herself in the very same room and through the windows beheld the very same objects that she had seen in her dreams. Her husband was one of the many who perished in the battle

fought near the River Borodino, from which an obscure village takes its name.[1]

23

This is evidently a very rare and perhaps solitary example of a long-dated prediction of a great historic event which nobody could foresee. It stirs more deeply than any other the enormous problems of fatality, free-will and responsibility. But has it been attested with sufficient rigour for us to rely upon it? That I cannot say. In any case, it has not been sifted by the S.P.R. Next, from the special point of view that interests us for the moment, we are unable to declare that this premonition had any chance of being of avail and preventing the general from going to Borodino. It is highly probable that he did not know where he was going or where he was; besides, the irresistible machinery of war held him fast and it was not his part to disengage his destiny. The premonition therefore could only have been given because it was certain not to be obeyed.

As for the two previous cases, nos. clv. and clviii.,

[1] *Memoirs of the Life and Labours of Stephen Grellet*, Vol. I., p. 434.

we must here again remark the usual strange reservations and observe how difficult it is to explain these premonitions save by attributing them to our subconsciousness. The main, unavoidable event is not precisely stated; but a subordinate consequence seems to be averted, as though to make us believe in some definite power of free-will. Nevertheless, the mysterious entity that foresaw the catastrophe must also have foreseen that nothing would happen to the person whom it was warning; and this brings us back to the useless farce of which we spoke above. Whereas, with the theory of a subconscious self, the latter may have—as in the case of the traveller, the promontory, the copper or the carriage—not this time by inferences or indications that escape our perception, but by other unknown means, a vague presentment of an impending peril, or, as I have already said, a partial, intermittent and unsettled vision of the future event, and, in its doubt, may utter its cry of alarm.

Whereupon let us recognise that it is almost forbidden to human reason to stray in these regions; and that the part of a prophet is, next to that of a commentator of prophecies, one of the most difficult

and thankless that a man can attempt to sustain on the world's stage.

24

I am not sure if it is really necessary, before closing this chapter, to follow in the wake of many others and broach the problem of the pre-existence of the future, which includes those of fatality, of free-will, of time and of space, that is to say, all the points that touch the essential sources of the great mystery of the universe. The theologians and the metaphysicians have tackled these problems from every side without giving us the least hope of solving them. Among those which life sets us, there is none to which our brain seems more definitely and strictly closed; and they remain, if not as unimaginable, at least as incomprehensible as on the day when they were first perceived. What corresponds, outside us, with what we call time and space? We know nothing about it; and Kant, speaking in the name of the "apriorists," who hold that the idea of time is innate in us, does not teach us much when he tells us that time, like space, is an *a priori* form of our sensibility, that is to say, an intuition preceding experience, even as Guyau, among the "empiricists," who consider that this idea is acquired

only by experience, does not enlighten us any more by declaring that this same time is the abstract formula of the changes in the universe. Whether space, as Leibnitz maintains, be an order of coexistence and time an order of sequences, whether it be by space that we succeed in representing time or whether time be an essential form of any representation, whether time be the father of space or space the father of time, one thing is certain, which is that the efforts of the Kantian or neo-Kantian apriorists and of the pure empiricists and the idealistic empiricists all end in the same darkness; that all the philosophers who have grappled with the formidable dual problem, among whom one may mention indiscriminately the names of the greatest thinkers of yesterday and to-day—Herbert Spencer, Helmholtz, Renouvier, James Sully, Stumpf, James Ward, William James, Stuart Mill, Ribot, Fouillée, Guyau, Bain, Lechalas, Balmès, Dunan and endless others—have been unable to tame it; and that, however much their theories may contradict one another, they are all equally defensible and alike struggle vainly in the darkness against shadows that are not of our world.

25

To catch a glimpse of this strange problem of the pre-existence of the future, as it shows itself to each of us, let us essay more humbly to translate it into tangible images, to place it as it were upon the stage. I am writing these lines sitting on a stone, in the shade of some tall beeches that overlook a little Norman village. It is one of those lovely summer days when the sweetness of life is almost visible in the azure vase of earth and sky. In the distance stretches the immense, fertile valley of the Seine, with its green meadows planted with restful trees, between which the river flows like a long path of gladness leading to the misty hills of the estuary. I am looking down on the village-square, with its ring of young lime-trees. A procession leaves the church and, amid prayers and chanting, they carry the statute of the Virgin around the sacred pile. I am conscious of all the details of the ceremony: the sly old curé perfunctorily bearing a small reliquary; four choirmen opening their mouths to bawl forth vacantly the Latin words which convey nothing to them; two mischievous serving-boys in frayed cassocks; a score of little girls, young girls and old

maids in white, all starched and flounced, followed by six or seven village notables in baggy frockcoats. The pageant disappears behind the trees, comes into sight again at the bend of the road and hurries back into the church. The clock in the steeple strikes five, as though to ring down the curtain and mark in the infinite history of events which none will recollect the conclusion of a spectacle which never again, until the end of the world and of the universe of worlds, will be just what it was during those seconds when it beguiled my wandering eyes.

For in vain will they repeat the procession next year and every year after: never again will it be the same. Not only will several of the actors probably have disappeared, but all those who resume their old places in the ranks will have undergone the thousand little visible and invisible changes wrought by the passing days and weeks. In a word, this insignificant moment is unique, irrecoverable, inimitable, as are all the moments in the existence of all things; and this little picture, enduring for a few seconds suspended in boundless duration, has lapsed into eternity, where henceforth it will remain in its entirety to the end of time, so much so that, if a man could one day recapture in the past,

among what some one has called the "astral negatives," the image of what it was, he would find it intact, unchanged, ineffaceable and undeniable.

26

It is not difficult for us to conceive that one can thus go back and see again the astral negative of an event that is no more; and retrospective clairvoyance appears to us a wonderful but not an impossible thing. It astonishes but does not stagger our reason. But, when it becomes a question of discovering the same picture in the future, the boldest imagination flounders at the first step. How are we to admit that there exists somewhere a representation or reproduction of that which has not yet existed? Nevertheless, some of the incidents which we have just been considering seem to prove in an almost conclusive manner not only that such representations are possible, but that we may arrive at them more frequently, not to say more conveniently, than at those of the past. Now, once this representation pre-exists, as we are obliged to admit in the case of a certain number of premonitions, the riddle remains the same whether the pre-existence be one of a few hours, a few years or several centuries.

It is therefore possible—for, in these matters, we must go straight to extremes or else leave them alone—it is therefore possible that a seer mightier than any of to-day, some god, demigod or demon, some unknown, universal or vagrant intelligence, saw that procession a million years ago, at a time when nothing existed of that which composes and surrounds it and when the very earth on which it moves had not yet risen from the ocean depths. And other seers, as mighty as the first, who from age to age contemplated the same spot and the same moment, would always have perceived, through the vicissitudes and upheavals of seas, shores and forests, the same procession going round the same little church that still lay slumbering in the oceanic ooze and made up of the same persons sprung from a race that was perhaps not yet represented on the earth.

27

It is obviously difficult for us to understand that the future can thus precede chaos, that the present is at the same time the future and the past, or that that which is not yet exists already at the same time at which it is no more. But, on the other hand,

it is just as hard to conceive that the future does not pre-exist, that there is nothing before the present and that everything is only present or past. It is very probable that, to a more universal intelligence than ours, everything is but an eternal present, an immense *punctum stans,* as the metaphysicians say, in which all the events are on one plane; but it is no less probable that we ourselves, so long as we are men, in order to understand anything of this eternal present, will always be obliged to divide it into three parts. Thus caught between two mysteries equally baffling to our intelligence, whether we deny or admit the pre-existence of the future, we are really only wrangling over words: in the one case, we give the name of "present," from the point of view of a perfect intelligence, to that which to us is the future; in the other, we give the name of "future" to that which, from the point of view of a perfect intelligence, is the present. But, after all, it is incontestable in both cases that, at least from our point of view, the future pre-exists, since pre-existence is the only name by which we can describe and the only form under which we can conceive that which we do not yet see in the present.

28

Attempts have been made to shed light on the riddle by transferring it to space. It is true that it there loses the greater part of its obscurity; but this apparently is because, in changing its environment, it has completely changed its nature and no longer bears any relation to what it was when it was placed in time. We are told, for instance, that innumerable cities distributed over the surface of the earth are to us as if they were not, so long as we have not seen them, and only begin to exist on the day when we visit them. That is true; but space, outside all metaphysical speculations, has realities for us which time does not possess. Space, although very mysterious and incomprehensible once we pass certain limits, is nevertheless not, like time, incomprehensible and illusory in all its parts. We are certainly quite able to conceive that those towns which we have never seen and doubtless never will see indubitably exist, whereas we find it much more difficult to imagine that the catastrophe which, fifty years hence, will annihilate one of them already exists as really as the town itself. We are capable of picturing a spot whence, with keener eyes than those which we boast to-day, we should

see in one glance all the cities of the earth and even those of other worlds, but it is much less easy for us to imagine a point in the ages whence we should simultaneously discover the past, the present and the future, because the past, the present and the future are three orders of duration which cannot find room at the same time in our intelligence and which inevitably devour one another. How can we picture to ourselves, for instance, a point in eternity at which our little procession already exists, while it is not yet and although it is no more? Add to this the thought that it is necessary and inevitable, from the millenaries which had no beginning, that, at a given moment, at a given place, the little procession should leave the little church in a given manner and that no known or imaginable will can change anything in it, in the future any more than in the past; and we begin to understand that there is no hope of understanding.

29

We find among the cases collected by M. Bozzano a singular premonition wherein the unknown factors of space and time are continued in a very curious fashion. In August, 1910, Cavaliere Giovanni

de Figueroa, one of the most famous fencing masters at Palermo, dreamt that he was in the country, going along a road white with dust, which brought him to a broad ploughed field. In the middle of the field stood a rustic building, with a ground-floor used for store-rooms and cow-sheds and on the right a rough hut made of branches and a cart with some harness lying in it.

A peasant wearing dark trousers with a black felt hat on his head, came forward to meet him, asked him to follow him and took him around behind the house. Through a low, narrow door they entered a little stable with a short, winding stone staircase leading to a loft over the entrance to the house. A mule fastened to a swinging manger was blocking the bottom step; and the chevalier had to push it aside before climbing the staircase. On reaching the loft, he noticed that from the ceiling were suspended strings of melons, tomatoes, onions and Indian corn. In this room were two women and a little girl; and through a door leading to another room he caught sight of an extremely high bed, unlike any that he had ever seen before.

Here the dream broke off. It seemed to him so

strange that he spoke of it to several of his friends, whom he mentions by name and who are ready to confirm his statements.

On the 12th of October in the same year, in order to support a fellow-townsman in a duel, he accompanied the seconds, by motor-car, from Naples to Marano, a place which he had never visited nor even heard of. As soon as they were some way in the country, he was curiously impressed by the white and rusty road. The car pulled up at the side of a field which he at once recognised. They alighted; and he remarked to one of the seconds:

"This is not the first time that I have been here. There should be a house at the end of this path and on the right a hut and a cart with some harness in it."

As a matter of fact, everything was as he described it. An instant later, at the exact moment foreseen by the dream, the peasant in the dark trousers and the black felt hat came up and asked him to follow him. But, instead of walking behind him, the chevalier went in front, for he already knew the way. He found the stable and, exactly at the place which it occupied two months before, near its swinging manger, the mule blocking the way to the

staircase. The fencing-master went up the steps and once more saw the loft, with the ceiling hung with melons, onions and tomatoes, and, in a corner on the right, the two silent women and the child, identical with the figures in his dream, while in the next room he recognised the bed whose uncommon height had so much impressed him.

It really looks as if the facts themselves, the extramundane realities, the eternal verities, or whatever we may be pleased to call them, have tried to show us here that time and space are one and the same illusion, one and the same convention and have no existence outside our little day-spanned understanding; that "everywhere" and "always" are exactly synonymous terms and reign alone as soon as we cross the narrow boundaries of the obscure consciousness in which we live. We are quite ready to admit that Cavaliere de Figueroa may have had by clairvoyance an exact and detailed vision of places which he was not to visit until later: this is a pretty frequent and almost classical phenomenon, which, as it affects the realities of space, does not astonish us beyond measure and, in any case, does not take us out of the world which our senses perceive. The field, the house, the hut, the

loft do not move; and it is no miracle that they should be found in the same place. But, suddenly, quitting this domain where all is stationary, the phenomenon is transferred to time and, in those unknown places, at the foretold second, brings together all the moving actors of that little drama in two acts, of which the first was performed some two and a half months before, in the depths of some mysterious other life where it seemed to be motionlessly and irrevocably awaiting its terrestrial realisation. Any explanation would but condense this vapour of petty mysteries into a few drops in the ocean of mysteries.

Let us note again, in passing, the strange freakishness of these premonitions. They accumulate the most precise and circumstantial details as long as the scene insignificant, but come to a sudden stop before the one tragic and interesting scene of the drama: the duel and its issue. We here once more recognise the inconsistent, impotent, ironical or humorous habits of our unknown guest.

30

But we will not prolong these somewhat vain speculations concerning space and time. We are

merely playing with words that represent very badly ideas which we do not put into form at all. To sum up, while it is difficult for us to conceive that the future pre-exists, perhaps it is even more difficult for us to understand that it does not exist; moreover, a certain number of facts tend to prove that it is as real and definite and has, both in time and in eternity, the same permanence and the same vividness as the past. Now, from the moment that it pre-exists, it is not surprising that we should be able to know it; it is even astonishing, granted that it overhangs us on every side, that we should not discover it oftener and more easily. It remains to be learnt what would become of our life if everything were foreseen in it, if we saw it unfolding beforehand, in its entirety, with its events which would have to be inevitable, because, if it were possible for us to avoid them, they would not exist and we could not perceive them. Suppose that, instead of being abnormal, uncertain, obscure, debatable and very unusual, prediction became, so to speak, scientific, habitual, clear and infallible: in a short time, having nothing more to foretell, it would die of inanition. If, for instance, it was prophesied to me that I must die in the course of

a journey in Italy, I should naturally abandon the journey; therefore it could not have been predicted to me; and thus all life would soon be nothing but inaction, pause and abstention, a sort of vast desert where the embryos of still-born events would be gathered in heaps and where nothing would grow save perhaps one or two more or less fortunate enterprises and the little insignificant incidents which no one would trouble to avoid. But these again are questions to which there is no solution; and we will not pursue them further.

IX

HEROISM

IX

HEROISM

1

ONE of the consoling surprises of the war is the unlooked-for and, so to speak, universal heroism which it has revealed among all the nations taking part in it.

We were rather inclined to believe that courage, physical and moral fortitude, self-denial, stoicism, the renunciation of every sort of comfort, the faculty of self-sacrifice and the power of facing death belonged only to the more primitive, the less happy, the less intelligent nations, to the nations least capable of reasoning, of appreciating danger and of picturing in their imagination the dreadful abyss that separates this life from the life unknown. We were even almost persuaded that war would one day cease for lack of soldiers, that is to say, of men foolish enough or unhappy enough to risk the only absolute realities—health, physical comfort,

an unimpaired body and, above all, life, the greatest of early possessions—for the sake of an ideal which, like all ideals, is more or less invisible.

And this argument seemed the more natural and convincing because, as existence grew gentler and men's nerves more sensitive, the means of destruction by war showed themselves more cruel, ruthless and irresistible. It seemed more and more probable that no man would ever again endure the infernal horrors of a battlefield and that, after the first slaughter, the opposing armies, officers and men alike, all seized with insuppressible panic, would turn their backs upon one another, in simultaneous, supernatural affright, and flee from unearthly terrors exceeding the most monstrous anticipations of those who had let them loose.

2

To our great astonishment the very opposite is now proclaimed.

We realise with amazement that until to-day we had but an incomplete and inaccurate idea of man's courage. We looked upon it as an exceptional virtue and one which is the more admired as being also the rarer the farther we go back in history.

Remember, for instance, Homer's heroes, the ancestors of all the heroes of our day. Study them closely. These models of antiquity, the first professors, the first masters of bravery, are not really very brave. They have a wholesome dread of being hit or wounded and an ingenuous and manifest fear of death. Their mighty conflicts are declamatory and decorative but not so very bloody; they inflict more noise than pain upon their adversaries, they deliver many more words than blows. Their defensive weapons—and this is characteristic—are greatly superior to their arms of offence; and death is an unusual, unforeseen and almost indecorous event which throws the ranks into disorder and most often puts a stop to the combat or provokes a headlong flight that seems quite natural. As for the wounds, these are enumerated and described, sung and deplored as so many remarkable phenomena. On the other hand, the most discreditable routs, the most shameful panics are frequent; and the old poet relates them without condemning them, as ordinary incidents to be ascribed to the gods and inevitable in any warfare.

This kind of courage is that of all antiquity, more or less. We will not linger over it, nor delay

to consider the battles of the Middle Ages or the Renascence, in which the fiercest hand-to-hand encounters of the mercenaries often left not more than half-a-dozen victims on the field. Let us rather come straight to the great wars of the Empire. Here the courage displayed begins to resemble our own, but with notable differences. In the first place, those concerned were solely professionals. We see not a whole nation fighting, but a delegation, a martial selection, which, it is true, becomes gradually more extensive, but never, as in our time, embraces every man between eighteen and fifty years of age capable of shouldering a weapon. Again—and above all—every war was reduced to two or three pitched battles, that is to say, two or three culminating moments: immense efforts, but efforts of a few hours, or a day at most, towards which the combatants directed all the vigour and all the heroism accumulated during long weeks or months of preparation and waiting. Afterwards, whether the result was victory or defeat, the fighting was over; relaxation, respite and rest followed; men went back to their homes. Destiny must not be defied more than once; and they knew that in the

most terrible affray the chances of escaping death were as twenty to one.

3

Nowadays, everything is changed; and death itself is no longer what it was. Formerly, you looked it in the face, you knew whence it came and who sent it to you. It had a dreadful aspect, but one that remained human. Its ways were not unknown: its long spells of sleep, its brief awakenings, its bad days and dangerous hours. At present, to all these horrors it adds the great, intolerable fear of mystery. It no longer has any aspect, no longer has habits or spells of sleep and it is never still. It is always ready, always on the watch, everywhere present, scattered, intangible and dense, stealthy and cowardly, diffuse, all-encompassing, innumerous, looming at every point of the horizon, rising from the waters and falling from the skies, indefatigable, inevitable, filling the whole of space and time for days, weeks and months without a minute's lull, without a second's intermission. Men live, move and sleep in the meshes of its fatal web. They know that the least step to the right or left, a head bowed or lifted, a body

bent or upright, is seen by its eyes and draws its thunder.

Hitherto we had no example of this preponderance of the destructive forces. We should never have believed that man's nerves could resist so great a trial. The nerves of the bravest man are tempered to face death for the space of a second, but not to live in the hourly expectation of death and nothing else. Heroism was once a sharp and rugged peak, reached for a moment but quitted forthwith, for mountain-peaks are not inhabitable. To-day it is a boundless plain, as uninhabitable as the peaks; but we are not permitted to descend from it. And so, at the very moment when man appeared most exhausted and enervated by the comforts and vices of civilisation, at the moment when he was happiest and therefore most selfish, when, possessing the minimum of faith and vainly seeking a new ideal, he seemed less capable of sacrificing himself for an idea of any kind, he finds himself suddenly confronted with an unprecedented danger, which he is almost certain that the most heroic nations of history would not have faced nor even dreamed of facing, whereas he does not even dream that it is possible to do aught but face it.

And let it not be said that we had no choice, that the danger and the struggle were thrust upon us, that we had to defend ourselves or die and that in such cases there are no cowards. It is not true: there was, there always has been, there still is a choice.

4

It is not man's life that is at stake, but the idea which he forms of the honour, the happiness and the duties of his life. To save his life he had but to submit to the enemy; the invader would not have exterminated him. You cannot exterminate a great people; it is not even possible to enslave it seriously or to inflict great sorrow upon it for long. He had nothing to be afraid of except disgrace. He did not so much as see the infamous temptation appear above the horizon of his most instinctive fears; he does not even suspect that it is able to exist; and he will never perceive it, whatever sacrifices may yet await him. We are not, therefore, speaking of a heroism that would be but the last resource of despair, the heroism of the animal driven to bay and fighting blindly to delay death's coming for a moment. No, it is heroism freely donned, deliberately and unanimously hailed,

heroism on behalf of an idea and a sentiment, in other words, heroism in its clearest, purest and most virginal form, a disinterested and wholehearted sacrifice for that which men regard as their duty to themselves, to their kith and kin, to mankind and to the future. If life and personal safety were more precious than the idea of honour, of patriotism and of fidelity to the tradition and the race, there was, I repeat, and there is still a choice to be made; and never perhaps in any war was the choice easier, for never did men feel more free, never indeed were they more free, to choose.

But this choice, as I have said, did not dare show its faintest shadow on the lowest horizons of even the most ignoble consciences. Are you quite sure that in other times which we think better and more virtuous than our own men would not have seen it, would not have spoken of it? Can you find a nation, even among the greatest, which, after six months of a war compared with which all other wars seem child's-play, of a war which threatens and uses up all that nation's life and all its possessions, can you find, I say, in history, not an instance—for there is no instance—but some similar case which allows you to presume that the nation

would not have faltered, would not at least, were it but for a second, have looked down and cast its eyes upon an inglorious peace?

5

Nevertheless, they seemed much stronger than we are, all those who came before us. They were rude, austere, much closer to nature, poor and often unhappy. They had a simpler and a more rigid code of thought; they had the habit of physical suffering, of hardship and of death. But I do not believe that any one dares contend that these men would have done what our soldiers are now doing, that they would have endured what is being endured all around us. Are we not entitled to conclude from this that civilisation, contrary to what was feared, so far from enervating, depraving, weakening, lowering and dwarfing man, elevates him, purifies him, strengthens him, ennobles him, makes him capable of acts of sacrifice, generosity and courage which he did not know before? The fact is that civilisation, even when it seems to entail corruption, brings intelligence with it and that intelligence, in days of trial, stands for potential pride, nobility and heroism. That, as I said in

the beginning, is the unexpected and consoling revelation of this horrible war: we can rely on man implicitly, place the greatest trust in him, nor fear lest, in laying aside his primitive brutality, he should lose his manly qualities. The greater his progress in the conquest of nature and the greater his apparent attachment to material welfare, the more does he become capable nevertheless, unconsciously, deep down in the best part of him, of self-detachment and of self-sacrifice for the common safety and the more does he understand that he is nothing when he compares himself with the eternal life of his forbears and his children.

It was so great a trial that we dared not, before this war, have contemplated it. The future of the human race was at stake; and the magnificent response that comes to us from every side reassures us fully as to the issue of other struggles, more formidable still, which no doubt await us when it will be a question no longer of fighting our fellow-men but rather of facing the more powerful and cruel of the great mysterious enemies that nature holds in reserve against us. If it be true, as I believe, that humanity is worth just as much as the sum total of latent heroism which it contains, then we

may declare that humanity was never stronger nor more exemplary than now and that it is at this moment reaching one of its highest points and capable of braving everything and hoping everything. And it is for this reason that, despite our present sadness, we are entitled to congratulate ourselves and to rejoice.

X

ON REREADING THUCYDIDES

X

ON REREADING THUCYDIDES

1

AT moments above all when history is in the making, in these times when great and as yet incomplete pages are being traced, pages by the side of which all that had already been written will pale, it is a good and salutary thing to turn to the past in search of instruction, warning and encouragement. In this respect, the unwearying and implacable war which Athens kept up against Sparta for twenty-seven years, with the hegemony of Greece for a stake, presents more than one analogy with that which we ourselves are waging and teaches lessons that should make us reflect. The counsels which it gives us are all the more precious, all the more striking or profound inasmuch as the war is narrated to us by a man who remains, with Tacitus, despite the striving of the centuries, the progress of life and all the opportuni-

ties of doing better, the greatest historian that the earth has ever known. Thucydides is in fact the supreme historian, at the same time swift and detailed, scrupulously sifting his evidence but giving free play to intuition, setting forth none but incontestable facts, yet divining the most secret intentions and embracing at a glance all the present and future political consequences of the events which he relates. He is withal one of the most perfect writers, one of the most admirable artists in the literature of mankind; and from this point of view, in an entirely different and almost antagonistic world, he has not an equal save Tacitus.

But Tacitus is before everything a wonderful tragic poet, a painter of foul abysses, of fire and blood, who can lay bare the souls of monsters and their crimes, whereas Thucydides is above all a great political moralist, a statesman endowed with extraordinary perspicacity, a painter of the open air and of a free state, who portrays the minds of those sane, ingenious, subtle, generous and marvellously intelligent men who peopled ancient Greece. The one piles on the gloom with a lavish hand, gathers dark shadows which he pierces at each sentence with lightning-flashes, but remains sombre

and oppressed on the very summits, whereas the other condenses nothing but light, groups together judgments that are so many radiant sheaves and remains luminous and breathes freely in the very depths. The first is passionate, violent, fierce, indignant, bitter, sincerely but pitilessly unjust and all made up of magnificent animosities; the second is always even, always at the same high level, which is that which the noblest endeavour of human reason can attain. He has no passion but a passion for the public weal, for justice, glory and intelligence. It is as though all his work were spread out in the blue sky; and even his famous picture of the plague of Athens seems covered with sunshine.

2

But there is no need to follow up this parallel, which is not my object. I will not dwell any longer —though perhaps I may return to them one day— upon the lessons which we might derive from that Peloponnesian War, in which the position of Athens towards Lacedæmon provides more than one point of comparison with that of France towards Germany. True, we do not there see, as in

our own case, civilised nations fighting a morally barbarian people: it was a contest between Greeks and Greeks, displaying, however, in the same physical race two different and incompatible spirits. Athens stood for human life in its happiest development, gracious, cheerful and peaceful. She took no serious interest except in the happiness, the imponderous riches, the innocent and perfect beauties, the sweet leisures, the glories and the arts of peace. When she went to war, it was as though in play, with the smile still on her face, looking upon it as a more violent pleasure than the rest, or as a duty joyfully accepted. She bound herself down to no discipline, she was never ready, she improvised everything at the last moment, having, "with habits not of labour but of ease and courage not of art but of nature," as Pericles said, "the double advantage of escaping the experience of hardships in anticipation and of facing them in the hour of need as fearlessly as those who are never free from them." [1]

For Sparta, on the other hand, life was nothing

[1] This and the later passage from Pericles' funeral oration I have quoted from the late Richard Crawley's admirable translation of Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* now published in the *Temple Classics*.—A. T. de M.

but endless work, an incessant strain, having no other objective than war. She was gloomy, austere, strict, morose, almost ascetic, an enemy to everything that excuses man's presence on this earth, a nation of spoilers, looters, incendiaries and devastators, a nest of wasps beside a swarm of bees, a perpetual menace and danger to everything around her, as hard upon herself as upon others and boasting an ideal which may appear lofty if it be man's ideal to be unhappy and the contented slave of unrelenting discipline. On the other hand, she differed entirely from those whom we are now fighting in that she was generally honest, loyal and upright and showed a certain respect for the gods and their temples, for treaties and for international law. It is none the less true that, if she had from the beginning reigned alone or without encountering a long resistance, Hellas would never have been the Hellas that we know. She would have left in history but a precarious trace of useless warlike virtues and of minor combats without glory; and mankind would not have possessed that centre of light towards which it turns to this day.

3

What was to be the issue of this war? Here begins the lesson which it were well to study thoroughly. It would seem indeed as if, with the first encounters in that conflict, as in our own, the inexplicable will that governs nations was favourable to the less civilised; and in fact Lacedæmon gained the upper hand, at least temporarily and sufficiently to abuse her victory to such a degree that she soon lost its fruits. But Athens held the evil will in check for seven-and-twenty years; for twenty-seven summers and twenty-seven winters, to use Thucydides' reckoning, she proved to us that it is possible, in defiance of probability, to fight against what seems written in the book of heaven and hell. Nay more, at a time when Sparta, whose sole industry, whose sole training, whose only reason for existence and whose only ideal was war, was hugging the thought of crushing in a few weeks under the weight of her formidable hoplites, a frivolous, careless and ill-organised city, Athens, not withstanding the treacherous blow which fate dealt her by sending a plague that carried off a third of her civil population and a quarter of her army,

Athens for seventeen years definitely held victory in her grasp. During this period, she more than once had Lacedæmon at her mercy and did not begin to descend the stony path of ruin and defeat until after the disastrous expedition to Sicily, in which, carried away by her rhetoricians and bitten with inconceivable folly, she hurled all her fleet, all her soldiers and all her wealth into a remote, unprofitable, unknown and desperate adventure. She resisted the decline of her fortunes for yet another ten years, heaping up her sins against wisdom and simple common sense and with her own hands drawing tighter the knot that was to strangle her, as though to show us that destiny is for the most part but our own madness and that what we call unavoidable fatality has its roots only in mistakes that might easily be avoided.

4

To point this moral was again not my real object. In these days when we have so many sorrows to assuage and so many deaths to honour, I wished merely to recall a page written over two thousand years ago, to the glory of the Athenian heroes who fell for their country in the first bat-

tles of that war. According to the custom of the Greeks, the bones of the dead that had been burnt on the battlefield were solemnly brought back to Athens at the end of the year; and the people chose the greatest speaker in the city to deliver the funeral oration. This honour fell to Pericles son of Xanthippus, the Pericles of the golden age of human beauty. After pronouncing a well-merited and magnificent eulogium on the Athenian nation and institutions, he concluded with the following words:

"Indeed, if I have dwelt at some length upon the character of our country, it has been to show that our stake in the struggle is not the same as theirs who have no such blessing to lose and also that the panegyric of the men over whom I am now speaking might be by definite proofs established. That panegyric is now in a great measure complete; for the Athens that I have celebrated is only what the heroism of these and their like have made her, men whose fame, unlike that of most Hellenes, will be found to be only commensurate with their deserts. And, if a test of worth be wanted, it is to be found in their closing scene; and this not only

in the cases in which it set the final seal upon their merit, but also in those in which it gave the first intimation of their having any. For there is justice in the claim that steadfastness in his country's battles should be as a cloak to cover a man's other imperfections, since the good action has blotted out the bad and his merit as a citizen more than outweighed his demerits as an individual. But none of these allowed either wealth with its prospect of future enjoyment to unnerve his spirit, or poverty with its hope of a day of freedom and riches to tempt him to shrink from danger. No, holding that vengeance upon their enemies was more to be desired that any personal blessings and reckoning this to be the most glorious of hazards, they joyfully determined to accept the risk, to make sure of their vengeance and to let their wishes wait; and, while committing to hope the uncertainty of final success, in the business before them they thought fit to act boldly and trust in themselves. Thus choosing to die resisting rather than to live submitting, they fled only from dishonour, but met danger face to face and, after one brief moment, while at the summit of their fortune, escaped not from their fear but from their glory.

"So died these men as became Athenians. You, their survivors, must determine to have as unfaltering a resolution in the field, though you may pray that it may have a happier issue. And, not contented with ideas derived only from words of the advantages which are bound up with the defence of your country, though these would furnish a valuable text to a speaker even before an audience so alive to them as the present, you must yourselves realise the power of Athens and feed your eyes upon her from day to day, till love of her fills your hearts; and then, when all her greatness shall break upon you, you must reflect that it was by courage, sense of duty and a keen feeling of honour in action that men were enabled to win all this and that no personal failure in an enterprise could make them consent to deprive their country of their valour, but they laid it at her feet as the most glorious contribution that they could offer. For by this offering of their lives made in common by them all they each of them individually received that renown which never grows old and, for a sepulchre, not so much that in which their bones have been deposited, but that noblest of shrines wherein their glory is laid up to be eternally remembered

upon every occasion on which deed or story shall call for its commemoration. For heroes have the whole earth for their tomb; and in lands far from their own, where the column with its epitaph declares it, there is enshrined in every breast a record unwritten with no tablet to preserve it, except that of the heart. These take as your model and, judging happiness to be the fruit of freedom and freedom of valour, never decline the dangers of war. For it is not the miserable that would most justly be unsparing of their lives: these have nothing to hope for; it is rather they to whom continued life may bring reverses as yet unknown and to whom a fall, if it came, would be most tremendous in its consequences. And surely, to a man of spirit, the degradation of cowardice must be immeasurably more grievous than the unfelt death which strikes him in the midst of his strength and patriotism!

"Comfort, therefore, not condolence, is what I have to offer to the parents of the dead who may be here. Numberless are the chances to which, as they know, the life of man is subject; but fortunate indeed are they who draw for their lot a death so glorious as that which has caused your mourning and to whom life has been so exactly measured

as to terminate in the happiness in which it has been passed. Still I know that this is a hard saying, especially when those are in question of whom you will be constantly reminded by seeing in the homes of others blessing of which once you also boasted; for grief is felt not so much for the want of what we have never known as for the loss of that to which we have been long accustomed. Yet you who are still of an age to beget children must bear up in the hope of having others in their stead: not only will they help you to forget those whom you have lost, but they will be to the state at once a reinforcement and a security; for never can a fair or just policy be expected of the citizen who does not, like his fellows, bring to the decision the interests and apprehensions of a father. While those of you who have passed your prime must congratulate yourselves with the thought that the best part of your life was fortunate and that the brief span that remains will be cheered by the fame of the departed. For it is only the love of honour that never grows old; and honour it is, not gain, as some would have felt it, that rejoices the heart of age and helplessness. . . .

"And, now that you have brought to a close

your lamentations for your relatives, you may depart."

These words spoken twenty-three centuries ago ring in our hearts as though they were uttered yesterday. They celebrate our dead better than could any eloquence of ours, however poignant it might be. Let us bow before their paramount beauty and before the great people that could applaud and understand.

XI

THE DEAD DO NOT DIE

XI

THE DEAD DO NOT DIE

1

WHEN we behold the terrible loss of so many young lives, when we see so many incarnations of physical and moral vigour, of intellect and of glorious promise pitilessly cut off in their first flower, we are on the verge of despair. Never before have the fairest energies and aspirations of men been flung recklessly and incessantly into an abyss whence comes no sound or answer. Never since it came into existence has humanity squandered its treasure, its substance and its prospects so lavishly. For more than twelve months, on every battlefield, where the bravest, the truest, the most ardent and self-sacrificing are necessarily the first to die and where the less courageous, the less generous, the weak, the ailing, in a word the less desirable, alone possess some chance of escaping the carnage, for over

twelve months a sort of monstrous inverse selection has been in operation, one which seems to be deliberately seeking the downfall of the human race. And we wonder uneasily what the state of the world will be after the great trial and what will be left of it and what will be the future of this stunted race, shorn of all the best and noblest part of it.

The problem is certainly one of the darkest that has ever vexed the minds of men. It contains a material truth before which we remain defenceless; and, if we accept it as it stands, we can discover no remedy for the evil that threatens us. But material and tangible truths are never anything but a more or less salient angle of greater and deeper-lying truths. And on the other hand mankind appears to be such a necessary and indestructible force of nature that it has always, hitherto, not only survived the most desperate ordeals, but succeeded in benefiting by them and emerging greater and stronger than before.

2

We know that peace is better than war; it were madness to compare the two. We know that, if

this cataclysm let loose by an act of unutterable folly had not come upon the world, mankind would doubtless have reached ere long a zenith of wonderful achievement whose manifestations it is impossible to foreshadow. We know that, if a third or a fourth part of the fabulous sums expended on extermination and destruction had been devoted to works of peace, all the iniquities that poison the air we breathe would have been triumphantly redressed and that the social question, the one great question, the matter of life and death which justice demands that posterity should face, would have found its definite solution, once and for all, in a happiness which now perhaps even our sons and grandsons will not realise. We know that the disappearance of two or three million young existences, cut down when they were on the point of bearing fruit, will leave in history a void that will not be easily filled, even as we know that among those dead were mighty intellects, treasures of genius which will not come back again and which contained inventions and discoveries that will now perhaps be lost to us for centuries. We know that we shall never grasp the consequences of this thrusting back of progress and of this unprece-

dented devastation. But, granting all this, it is a good thing to recover our balance and stand upon our feet. There is no irreparable loss. Everything is transformed, nothing perishes and that which seems to be hurled into destruction is not destroyed at all. Our moral world, even as our physical world, is a vast but hermetically-sealed sphere, whence naught can issue, whence naught can fall to be dissolved in space. All that exists, all that comes into being upon this earth remains there and bears fruit; and the most appalling wastage is but material or spiritual riches flung away for an instant, to fall to the ground again in a new form. There is no escape or leakage, no filtering through cracks, no missing the mark, not even waste or neglect. All this heroism poured out on every side does not leave our planet; and the reason why the courage of our fighters seems so general and yet so extraordinary is that all the might of the dead has passed into those who survive. All those forces of wisdom, patience, honour and self-sacrifice which increase day by day and which we ourselves, who are far from the field of danger, feel rising within us without knowing

whence they come are nothing but the souls of the heroes gathered and absorbed by our own souls.

3

It is well at times to contemplate invisible things as though we saw them with our eyes. This was the aim of all the great religions, when they but represented under forms appropriate to the manners of their day the latent deep, instinctive truths, the general and essential truths which are the guiding principles of mankind. All have felt and recognised that loftiest of all truths, the communion of the living and the dead, and have given it various names designating the same mysterious verity: the Christians know it as revival of merit, the Buddhists as reincarnation, or transmigration of souls, and the Japanese as Shintoism, or ancestor-worship. The last are more fully convinced than any other nation that the dead do not cease to live and that they direct our actions, are exalted by our virtues and become gods.

Lafcadio Hearn, the writer who has most closely studied and understood that wonderful ancestor-worship, says:

"One of the surprises of our future will certainly

be a return to beliefs and ideas long ago abandoned upon the mere assumption that they contained no truths—beliefs still called barbarous, pagan, mediæval, by those who condemn them out of traditional habit. Year after year the researches of science afford us new proof that the savage, the barbarian, the idolater, the monk, each and all have arrived, by different paths, as near to some one point of eternal truth as any thinker of the nineteenth century. We are now learning, also, that the theories of the astrologers and of the alchemists were but partially, not totally, wrong. We have reason even to suppose that no dream of the invisible world has ever been dreamed,—that no hypothesis of the unseen has ever been imagined,—which future science will not prove to have contained some germ of reality." [1]

There are many things which might be added to these lines, notably all that the most recent of our sciences, metaphysics, is engaged in discovering with regard to the miraculous faculties of our subconsciousness.

[1] *Kokoro: Hints and Echoes of Japanese Life*, chapter xiv.: "Some Thoughts about Ancestor-Worship."

4

But, to return more directly to what we were saying, was it not observed that, after the great battles of the Napoleonic era, the birth-rate increased in an extraordinary manner, as though the lives suddenly cut short in their prime were not really dead and were eager to be back again in our midst and complete their career? If we could follow with our eyes all that is happening in the spiritual world that rises above us on every side, we should no doubt see that it is the same with the moral force that seems to be lost on the field of slaughter. It knows where to go, it knows its goal, it does not hesitate. All that our wonderful dead relinquished they bequeath to us; and, when they die for us, they leave us their lives not in any strained, metaphorical sense, but in a very real and direct way. Virtue goes out of every man who falls while performing a deed of glory; and that virtue drops down upon us; and nothing of him is lost and nothing evaporates in the shock of a premature end. He gives us in one solitary and mighty stroke what he would have given us in a long life of duty and love. Death does not injure life; it is

powerless against it. Life's aggregate never changes. What death takes from those who fall enters into those who are left standing. The number of lamps grows less, but the flame rises higher. Death is in no wise the gainer so long as there are living men. The more it exercises its ravages, the more it increases the intensity of that which it cannot touch; the more it pursues its phantom victories, the better does it prove to us that man will end by conquering death.

XII

IN MEMORIAM

XII

IN MEMORIAM

THOSE who die for their country should not be numbered with the dead. We must call them by another name. They have nothing in common with those who end in their beds a life that is worn out, a life almost always too long and often useless. Death, which every elsewhere is but the object of fear and horror, bringing naught but nothingness and despair, this death, on the field of battle, in the clash of glory, becomes more beautiful than birth and exhales a grace greater than that of love. No life will ever give what their youth is offering us, that youth which gives in one moment the days and the years that lay before it. There is no sacrifice to be compared with that which they have made; for which reason there is no glory that can soar so high as theirs, no gratitude that can surpass the gratitude which we owe them. They have not only a right to the foremost place in our memories: they have a

right to all our memories and to everything that we are, since we exist only through them.

And now it is in us that their life, so suddenly cut short, must resume its course. Whatever be our faith and whatever the God whom it adores, one thing is almost certain and, in spite of all appearances, is daily becoming more certain: it is that death and life are commingled; the dead and the living alike are but moments, hardly dissimilar, of a single and infinite existence and members of one immortal family. They are not beneath the earth, in the depths of their tombs; they lie deep in our hearts, where all that they once were will continue to live and to act; and they live in us even as we die in them. They see us, they understand us more nearly than when they were in our arms; let us then keep a watch upon ourselves, so that they witness no actions and hear no words but words and actions that shall be worthy of them.

XIII

THE LIFE OF THE DEAD

XIII

THE LIFE OF THE DEAD

1

THE other day I went to see a woman whom I knew before the war—she was happy then—and who had lost her only son in one of the battles in the Argonne. She was a widow, almost a poor woman; and, now that this son, her pride and her joy, was no more, she no longer had any reason for living. I hesitated to knock at her door. Was I not about to witness one of those hopeless griefs at whose feet all words fall to the ground like shameful and insulting lies? Which of us to-day is not familiar with these mournful interviews, this dismal duty?

To my great astonishment, she offered me her hand with a kindly smile. Her eyes, to which I hardly dared raise my own, were free of tears.

"You have come to speak of him," she said,

in a cheerful tone; and it was as though her voice had grown younger.

"Alas, yes! I had heard of your sorrow; and I have come . . ."

"Yes, I too believed that my unhappiness was irreparable; but now I know that he is not dead."

"What! He is not dead? Do you mean that the news . . . ? But I thought that the body . . ."

"Yes, his body is over there; and I have even a photograph of his grave. Let me show it to you. See, that cross on the left, the fourth cross: that is where he is lying. One of his friends, who buried him, sent me this card and gave me all the details. He suffered no pain. There was not even a death-struggle. And he has told me so himself. He is quite astonished that death should be so easy, so slight a thing. . . . You do not understand? Yes, I see what it is: you are just as I used to be, as all the others are. I do not explain the matter to the others; what would be the use? They do not wish to understand. But you, you will understand. He is more alive than he ever was; he is free and happy. He does just as he likes. He tells me that one cannot

imagine what a release death is, what a weight it removes from you, nor the joy which it brings. He comes to see me when I call him. He loves especially to come in the evening; and we chat as we used to. He has not altered; he is just as he was on the day when he went away, only younger, stronger, handsomer. We have never been happier, more united, nearer to one another. He divines my thoughts before I utter them. He knows everything; he sees everything; but he cannot tell me everything he knows. He maintains that I must be wanting to follow him and that I must wait for my hour. And, while I wait, we are living in a happiness greater than that which was ours before the war, a happiness which nothing can ever trouble again. . . ."

Those about her pitied the poor woman; and, as she did not weep, as she was gay and smiling, they believed her mad.

2

Was she as mad as they thought? At the present moment, the great questions of the world beyond the grave are pressing upon us from every side. It is probable that, since the world began,

there have never been so many dead as now. The empire of death was never so mighty, so terrible; it is for us to defend and enlarge the empire of life. In the presence of his mother, which are right and which are wrong, those who are convinced that their dead are for ever swept out of existence, or those who are persuaded that their dead do not cease to live, who believe that they see them and hear them? Do we know what it is that dies in our dead, or even if anything dies? Whatever our religious faith may be, there is at any rate one place where they cannot die. That place is within ourselves; and, if this unhappy mother went beyond the truth, she was yet nearer to it than those despairing ones who nourish the mournful certainty that nothing survives of those whom they loved. She felt too keenly what we do not feel keenly enough. She remembered too much; and we do not know how to remember. Between the two errors there is room for a great truth; and, if we have to choose, hers is the error towards which we should lean. Let us learn to acquire through reason that which a wise madness bestowed on her. Let us learn from her to live with our dead and to live with them without sadness and

without terror. They do not ask for tears, but for a happy and confident affection. Let us learn from her to resuscitate those whom we regret. She called to hers, while we repulse ours; we are afraid of them and are surprised that they lose heart and pale and fade away and leave us for ever. They need love as much as do the living. They die, not at the moment when they sink into the grave, but gradually as they sink into oblivion, and it is oblivion alone that makes the separation irrevocable. We should not allow it to heap itself above them. It would be enough to vouchsafe them each day a single one of those thoughts which we bestow uncounted upon so many useless objects: they would no longer think of leaving us; they would remain around us and we should no longer understand what a tombstone is, for there is no tomb, however deep, whose stone may not be raised and whose dust dispersed by a thought.

There would be no difference between the living and the dead if we but knew how to remember. There would be no more dead. The best of what they were dwells with us after fate has taken them from us; all their past is ours; and it is wider than the present, more certain than the future.

Material presence is not everything in this world; and we can dispense with it without despairing. We do not mourn those who live in lands which we shall never visit, because we know that it depends on us whether we go to find them. Let it be the same with our dead. Instead of believing that they have disappeared never to return, tell yourselves that they are in a country to which you yourself will assuredly go soon, a country not so very far away. And while waiting for the time when you will go there once and for all, you may visit them in thought as easily as if they were still in a region inhabited by the living. The memory of the dead is even more alive than that of the living; it is as though they were assisting our memory, as though they, on their side, were making a mysterious effort to join hands with us on ours. One feels that they are far more powerful than the absent who continue to breathe as we do.

3

Try then to recall those whom you have lost, before it is too late, before they have gone too far; and you will see that they will come much closer to your heart, that they will belong to you

more truly, that they are as real as when they were in the flesh. In putting off this last, they have but discarded the moments in which they loved us least or in which we did not love at all. Now they are pure; they are clothed only in the fairest hours of life; they no longer possess faults, littlenesses, oddities; they can no longer fall away, or deceive themselves, or give us pain. They care for nothing now but to smile upon us, to encompass us with love, to bring us a happiness drawn without stint from a past which they live again beside us.

XIV

THE WAR AND THE PROPHETS

XIV

THE WAR AND THE PROPHETS

1

AT the end an essay occuring in *The Unknown Guest* and entitled, *The Knowledge of the Future,* in which I examined a certain number of phenomena relating to the anticipatory perception of events, such as presentments, premonitions, precognitions, predictions, etc., I concluded in nearly the following terms:

"To sum up, if it is difficult for us to conceive that the future pre-exists, perhaps it is just as difficult for us to understand that it does not exist; moreover, many facts tend to prove that it is as real and definite and has, both in time and eternity, the same permanence and the same vividness as the past. Now, from the moment that it pre-exists, it is not surprising that we should be able to know it; it is even astonishing, granted that it overhangs

us from every side, that we should not discover it oftener and more easily."

Above all it is astonishing and almost inconceivable that this universal war, the most stupendous catastrophe that has overwhelmed humanity since the origin of things, should not, while it was approaching, bearing in its womb innumerable woes which were about to affect almost every one of us, have thrown upon us more plainly, from the recesses of those days in which it was making ready, its menacing shadow. One would think that it ought to have overcast the whole horizon of the future, even as it will overcast the whole horizon of the past. A secret of such weight, suspended in time, ought surely to have weighed upon all our lives; and presentiments or revelations should have arisen on every hand. There was none of these. We lived and moved without uneasiness beneath the disaster which, from year to year, from day to day, from hour to hour, was descending upon the world; and we perceived it only when it touched our heads. True, it was more or less foreseen by our reason; but our reason hardly believed in it; and besides I am not for the moment speaking of the inductions of the understanding, which are al-

ways uncertain and which are resigned beforehand to the capricious contradictions which they are daily accustomed to receive from facts.

2

But I repeat, beside or above these inductions of our everyday logic, in the less familiar domain of supernatural intuitions, of divination, prediction or prophecy properly so-called, we find that there was practically nothing to warn us of the vast peril. This does not mean that there was any lack of predictions or prophecies collected after the event; these number, it appears, no fewer than eighty-three; but none of them, excepting those of Léon Sonrel and the Rector of Ars, which we will examine in a moment, is worthy of serious discussion. I shall therefore mention, by way of a reminder, only the most widely known; and, first of all, the famous prophecy of Mayence or Strasburg, which is supposed to have been discovered by a certain Jecker in an ancient convent founded near Mayence by St. Hildegarde, of which the original text could not be found and of which no one until lately had ever heard. Then there is another prophecy of Mayence or Flensberg, pub-

lished in the *Neue Metaphysische Rundschau* of Berlin in February 1912, in which the end of the German Empire is announced for the year 1913. Next, we have various predictions uttered by Mme. de Thèbes, by Dom Bosco, by Blessed Andrew Bobola, by Korzenicki the Polish monk, by Tolstoy, by Brother Hermann and so on, which are even less interesting; and, lastly, the prophecy of "Brother Johannes," published by M. Joséphin Peladan in the *Figaro* of 16 September 1914, which contains no evidence of genuineness and must therefore be regarded merely as an ingenious literary conceit.

3

All these, on examination, leave but a worthless residuum; but the prophecies of the Rector of Ars and Léon Sonrel are more curious and worthy of a moment's attention.

Father Jean-Baptiste Vianney, Rector of Ars, was, as everybody knows, a very saintly priest, who appears to have been endowed with extraordinary mediumistic faculties. The prophecy in question was made public in 1862, three years after the miracle-worker's death, and was confirmed by a letter which Mgr. Perriet addressed to the Very

Rev. Dom Gréa on the 24th of February 1908. Moreover it was printed, as far back as 1872, in a collection entitled, *Voix prophétiques, ou signes, apparitions et prédictions modernes.* It therefore has an incontestable date. I pass over the part relating to the war of 1870, which does not offer the same safeguards; but I give that which concerns the present war, quoting from the 1872 text:

"The enemies will not go altogether; they will return again and destroy everything upon their passage; we shall not resist them, but will allow them to advance; and, after that, we shall cut off their provisions and make them suffer great losses. They will retreat towards their country; we shall follow them and there will be hardly any who return home. Then we shall take back all that they took from us and much more."

As for the date of the event, it is stated definitely and rather strikingly in these words:

"They will want to canonise me, but there will not be time."

Now the preliminaries to the canonisation of the Rector of Ars were begun in July 1914, but were abandoned because of the war.

4

I now come to the Sonrel prediction. I will summarise it as briefly as possible from the admirable article which M. de Vesme devoted to it in the *Annales des Sciences Psychiques.*[1]

On the 3rd of June 1914—observe the date—Professor Charles Richet handed M. de Vesme, from Dr. Amédée Tardieu, a manuscript of which the following is the substance: on the 23rd or 24th of July 1869, Dr. Tardieu was strolling in the gardens of the Luxembourg with his friend Léon Sonrel, a former pupil of the Higher Normal School and teacher of natural philosophy at the Paris Observatory, when the latter had a kind of vision in the course of which he predicted various precise and actual episodes of the war of 1870, such as the collection on behalf of the wounded at the moment of departure and the amount of the sum collected in the soldiers' képis; incidents of the journey to the frontier; the battle of Sedan, the rout of the French, the civil war, the siege of Paris, his own death, the birth of a posthumous child, the doctor's political career and so on: predictions all of which were verified, as is attested by numerous

[1] August, September and October 1915.

witnesses who are worthy of the fullest credence. But I will pass over this part of the story and consider only that portion which refers to the present war:

"I have been waiting for two years," to quote the text of Dr. Tardieu's manuscript of the 3rd of June, "I have been waiting for two years for the sequel of the prediction which you are about to read. I omit everything that concerns my friend Léon's family and my own private affairs. Yet there is in my life at this moment a personal matter, which, as always happens, agrees too closely with general occurrences for me to be able to doubt what follows:

" 'O my God! My country is lost: France is dead! . . . What a disaster! . . . Ah, see, she is saved! She extends to the Rhine! O France, O my beloved country, you are triumphant; you are the queen of nations! . . . Your genius shines forth over the world. . . . All the earth wonders at you. . . .' "

These are the words contained in the document written at the Mont-Dore on the 3rd and handed to M. de Vesme on the 13th of June, 1914, at a

moment when no one was thinking of the terrible war which to-day is ravaging half the world.

When questioned, after the declaration of war, by M. de Vesme on the subject of the prophetic phrase, "I have been waiting for two years for the sequel of the prediction which you are about to read," Dr. Tardieu replied, on the 12th of August:

"I had been waiting for two years; and I will tell you why. My friend Léon did not name the year, but the more general events are described simultaneously with the events of my own life. Now the events which concern me privately and which were doubtful two years ago became certain in April or May last. My friends know that since May last I have been announcing war as due before September, basing my prediction on coincidences with events in my private life of which I do not speak."

5

These, up to the present, are the only prophecies known to us that deserve any particular attention. The prediction in both is timid and laconic; but, in those regions where the least gleam of light assumes extraordinary importance, it is not to be neglected. I admit, for the rest, that there has

so far been no time to carry out a serious enquiry on this point, but I should be greatly surprised if any such enquiry gave positive results and if it did not allow us to state that the gigantic event, as a whole, as a general event, was neither foreseen nor divined. On the other hand, we shall probably learn, when the enquiry is completed, that hundreds of deaths, accidents, wounds and cases of individual ruin and misfortune included in the great disaster were predicted by clairvoyants, by mediums, by dreams and by every other manner of premonition with a definiteness sufficient to eliminate any kind of doubt. I have said elsewhere what I think of individual predictions of this kind, which seem to be no more than the reading of the presentiments which we carry within us, presentiments which themselves, in the majority of cases, are but the perception, by the as yet imperfectly known senses of our subconsciousness, of events in course of formation or in process of realisation which escape the attention of our understanding. However, it would still remain to be explained how a wholly accidental death or wound could be perceived by these subliminal senses as an event in course of formation. In any case, it would once

more be confirmed, after this great test, that the knowledge of the future, so soon as it ceases to refer to a strictly personal fact and one, moreover, not at all remote, is always illusory, or rather impossible.

Apart then from these strictly personal cases, which for the moment we will agree to set aside, it appears more than ever certain that there is no communication between ourselves and the vast store of events which have not yet occurred and which nevertheless seem already to exist at some place, where they await the hour to advance upon us, or rather the moment when we shall pass before them. As for the exceptional and precarious infiltrations which belong not merely to the present that is still unknown, veiled or disguised, but really to the future, apart from the two which we have just examined, which are inconclusive, I, for my part, know of but four or five that appear to be rigorously verified; and these I have discussed in the essay which I have already mentioned. For that matter, they have no bearing upon the present war. They are, when all is said, so exceptional that they do not prove much; at the most, they seem to confirm the idea that a store exists filled

with future events as real, as distinct and as immutable as those of the past; and they allow us to hope that there are paths leading thither which as yet we do not know, but which it will not be for ever impossible to discover.

XV

THE WILL OF EARTH

XV

THE WILL OF EARTH

1

TO-DAY'S conflict is but a revival of that which has not ceased to drench the west of Europe in blood since the historical birth of the continent. The two chief episodes in this struggle, as we all know, are the invasion of Roman Gaul, including the north of Italy, by the Franks and the successive conquests of England by the Anglo-Saxons and the Normans. Without delaying to consider questions of race, which are complex, uncertain and always open to discussion, we may, regarding the matter from another aspect, perceive in the persistency and the bitterness of this conflict the clash of two wills, of which one or the other succumbs for a moment, only to rise up again with increased energy and obstinacy. On the one hand is the will of earth or nature, which, in the human species as in all others, openly favours brute

or physical force; and on the other hand is the will of humanity, or at least of a portion of humanity, which seeks to establish the empire of other more subtle and less animal forces. It is incontestable that hitherto the former has always won the day. But it is equally incontestable that its victory has always been only apparent and of brief duration. It has regularly suffered defeat in its very triumph. Gaul, invaded and overrun, presently absorbs her victor, even as England little by little transforms her conquerors. On the morrow of victory, the instruments of the will of earth turn upon her and arm the hand of the vanquished. It is probable that the same phenomenon would recur once more to-day, were events to follow the course prescribed by destiny. Germany, after crushing and enslaving the greater part of Europe, after driving her back and burdening her with innumerable woes, would end by turning against the will which she represents; and that will, which until to-day had always found in this race a docile tool and its favourite accomplices, would be forced to seek these elsewhere, a task less easy than of old.

2

But now, to the amazement of all those who will one day consider them in cold blood, events are suddenly ascending the irresistible current and, for the first time since we have been in a position to observe it, the adverse will is encountering an unexpected and insurmountable resistance. If this resistance, as we can now no longer doubt, maintains itself victoriously to the end, there will never perhaps have been such a sudden change in the history of mankind; for man will have gained, over the will of earth or nature or fatality, a triumph infinitely more significant, more heavily fraught with consequences and perhaps more decisive than all those which, in other provinces, appear to have crowned his efforts more brilliantly.

Let us not then be surprised that this resistance should be stupendous, or that it should be prolonged beyond anything that our experience of wars has taught us to expect. It was our prompt and easy defeat that was written in the annals of destiny. We had against us all the forces accumulated since the birth of Europe. We have to set history revolving in the reverse direction. We

are on the point of succeeding; and, if it be true that intelligent beings watch us from the vantage-point of other worlds, they will assuredly witness the most curious spectacle that our planet has offered them since they discovered it amid the dust of stars that glitters in space around it. They must be telling themselves in amazement that the ancient and fundamental laws of earth are suddenly being transgressed.

3

Suddenly? That is going too far. This transgression of a lower law, which was no longer of the stature of mankind, had been preparing for a very long time; but it was within an ace of being hideously punished. It succeeded only by the aid of a part of those who formerly swelled the great wave which they are to-day resisting by our side, as though something in the history of the world or the plans of destiny had altered; or rather as though we ourselves had at last succeeded in altering that something and in modifying laws to which until this day we were wholly subject.

But it must not be thought that the conflict will end with the victory. The deep-seated forces of

earth will not be at once disarmed; for a long time to come the invisible war will be waged under the reign of peace. If we are not careful, victory may even be more disastrous to us than defeat. For defeat, indeed, like previous defeats, would have been merely a victory postponed. It would have absorbed, exhausted, dispersed the enemy, by scattering him about the world, whereas our victory will bring upon us a two-fold peril. It will leave the enemy in a state of savage isolation in which, thrown back upon himself, cramped, purified by misfortune and poverty, he will secretly reinforce his formidable virtues, while we, for our part, no longer held in check by his unbearable but salutary menace, will give rein to failings and vices which sooner or later will place us at his mercy. Before thinking of peace, then, we must make sure of the future and render it powerless to injure us. We cannot take too many precautions, for we are setting ourselves against the manifest desire of the power that bears us.

This is why our efforts are difficult and worthy of praise. We are setting ourselves—we cannot too often repeat it—against the will of earth. Our enemies are urged forward by a force that drives

us back. They are marching with nature, whereas we are striving against the great current that sweeps the globe. The earth has an idea, which is no longer ours. She remains convinced that man is an animal in all things like other animals. She has not yet observed that he is withdrawing himself from the herd. She does not yet know that he has climbed her highest mountain-peaks. She has not yet heard tell of justice, pity, loyalty and honour; she does not realise what they are, or confounds them with weakness, clumsiness, fear and stupidity. She has stopped short at the original certitudes which were indispensable to the beginnings of life. She is lagging behind us; and the interval that divides us is rapidly increasing. She thinks less quickly; she has not yet had time to understand us. Moreover, she does not reckon as we do; and for her the centuries are less than our years. She is slow because she is almost eternal, while we are prompt because we have not many hours before us. It may be that one day her thought will overtake ours; in the meantime, we have to vindicate our advance and to prove to ourselves, as we are beginning to do, that it is lawful to be in the right as against her, that our ad-

vance is not fatal and that it is possible to maintain it.

4

For it is becoming difficult to argue that earth or nature is always right and that those who do not blindly follow earth's impulses are necessarily doomed to perish. We have learned to observe her more attentively and we have won the right to judge her. We have discovered that, far from being infallible, she is continually making mistakes. She gropes and hesitates. She does not know precisely what she wants. She begins by making stupendous blunders. She first peoples the world with uncouth and incoherent monsters, not one of which is capable of living; these all disappear. Gradually she acquires, at the cost of the life which she creates, an experience that is the cruel fruit of the immeasurable suffering which she unfeelingly inflicts. At last she grows wiser, curbs and amends herself, corrects herself, returns upon her footsteps, repairs her errors, expending her best energies and her highest intelligence upon the correction. It is incontestable that she is improving her methods, that she is more skilful, more prudent and less extravagant than at the outset.

And yet the fact remains that, in every department of life, in every organism, down to our own bodies, there is a survival of bad workmanship, of twofold functions, of oversights, changes of intention, absurdities, useless complications and meaningless waste. We therefore have no reason to believe that our enemies are in the right because earth is with them. Earth does not possess the truth any more than we do. She seeks it, as do we, and discovers it no more readily. She seems to know no more than we whither she is going or whither she is being led by that which leads all things.

We must not listen to her without enquiry; and we need not distress ourselves or despair because we are not of her opinion. We are not dealing with an infallible and unchangeable wisdom, to oppose which in our thoughts would be madness. We are actually proving to her that it is she who is in fault; that man's reason for existence is loftier than that which she provisionally assigned to him; that he is already outstripping all that she foresaw; and that she does wrong to delay his advance. She is, indeed, full of good-will, is able on occasion to recognise her mistakes and to obviate their disastrous results and by no means takes refuge in ma-

jestic and inflexible self-conceit. If we are able to persevere, we shall be able to convince her. Much time will be needed, for, I repeat, she is slow, though in no wise obstinate. Much time will be needed because a very long future is in question, a very great change and the most important victory that man has ever hoped to win.

XVI

WHEN THE WAR IS OVER

XVI

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1

BEFORE closing this book, I wish to weigh for the last time in my conscience the words of hatred and malediction which the war has made me utter in spite of myself. We have to do with the strangest of enemies. He has knowingly and deliberately, while in the full possession of his faculties and without necessity or excuse, revived all the crimes which we supposed to be for ever buried in the barbarous past. He has trampled under foot all the precepts which man had so painfully won from the cruel darkness of his beginnings; he has violated all the laws of justice, humanity, loyalty and honour, from the highest, which are almost godlike, to the simplest, the most elementary, which still belong to the lower worlds. There is no longer any doubt on this

point: it has been proved over and over again until we have attained a final certitude.

2

On the other hand, it is no less certain that he has displayed virtues which it would be unworthy of us to deny; for we honour ourselves in recognising the valour of those whom we are fighting. He has gone to his death in deep, compact, disciplined masses, with a blind, hopeless, obstinate heroism, of which no such lurid example had ever yet been known and which has many times compelled our admiration and our pity. He has known how to sacrifice himself, with unprecedented and perhaps unequalled abnegation, to an idea which we know to be false, inhuman and even somewhat mean, but which he believes to be just and lofty; and a sacrifice of this kind, whatever its object, is always the proof of a force which survives those who devote themselves to making it and must command respect.

I know very well that this heroism is not like the heroism which we love. For us, heroism must before all be voluntary, free from any constraint, active, ardent, eager and spontaneous; whereas

with our enemies it has mingled with it a great deal of servility, passiveness, sadness, gloomy, ignorant, massive submission and rather base fears. It is nevertheless the fact that, in the moment of supreme peril, little remains of all these distinctions and that no force in the world can drive to its death a people which does not bear within itself the strength to confront it. Our soldiers make no mistake upon this point. Question the men returning from the trenches: they detest the enemy, they abhor the aggressor, the unjust and arrogant aggressor, uncouth, too often cruel and treacherous; but they do not hate the man: they do him justice; they pity him; and, after the battle, in the defenceless wounded soldier or disarmed prisoner they recognise, with astonishment, a brother in misfortune who, like themselves, is submitting to duties and laws which, like themselves, he too believes lofty and necessary. Under the insufferable enemy they see an unhappy man who likewise is bearing the burden of life. They forget the things that divide them to recall only those which unite them in a common destiny; and they teach us a great lesson. Better than ourselves, who are far from danger, at the contact of profound and fearful verities

and realities they are already beginning to discern something that we cannot yet perceive; and their obscure instinct is probably anticipating the judgment of history and our own judgment, when we see more clearly. Let us learn from them to be just and to distinguish that which we are bound to despise and loathe from that which we may pity, love and respect. Setting aside the unpardonable aggression and the inexpiable violation of treaties, this war, despite its insanity, has come near to being a bloody but magnificent proof of greatness, heroism and the spirit of sacrifice. Humanity was ready to rise above itself, to surpass all that it had hitherto accomplished. It has surpassed it. Never before had nations been seen capable for months on end, perhaps for years, of renouncing their repose, their security, their wealth, their comfort, all that they possessed and loved, down to their very life, in order to do what they believed to be their duty. Never before had nations been seen that were able as a whole to understand and admit that the happiness of each of those who live in this time of trial is of no consequence compared with the honour of those who live no more or the happiness of those who are not yet alive. We stand on

heights that had not been attained before. And, if, on the enemies' side, this unexampled renunciation had not been poisoned at its source; if the war which they are waging against us had been as fine, as loyal, as generous, as chivalrous as that which we are waging against them, we may well believe that it would have been the last and that it would have ended, not in a battle, but, like the awakening from an evil dream, in a noble and fraternal amazement. They have made that impossible; and this, we may be sure, is the disappointment which the future will find it most difficult to forgive them.

3

What are we to do now? Must we hate the enemy to the end of time? The burden of hatred is the heaviest that man can bear upon this earth; and we should faint under the weight of it. On the other hand, we do not wish once more to be the dupes and victims of confidence and love. Here again our soldiers, in their simplicity, which is so clear-seeing and so close to the truth, anticipate the future and teach us what to admit and what to avoid. We have seen that they do not hate the man; but they do not trust him at all. They dis-

cover the human being in him only when he is unarmed. They know, from bitter experience, that, so long as he possesses weapons, he cannot resist the frenzy of destruction, treachery and slaughter; and that he does not become kindly until he is rendered powerless.

Is he thus by nature, or has he been perverted by those who lead him? Have the rulers dragged the whole nation after them, or has the whole nation driven its rulers on? Did the rulers make the nation like unto themselves, or did the nation select and support them because they resembled itself? Did the evil come from above or below, or was it everywhere? Here we have the great obscure point of this terrible adventure. It is not easy to throw light upon it and still less easy to find excuses for it. If our enemies prove that they were deceived and corrupted by their masters, they prove, at the same time, that they are less intelligent, less firmly attached to justice, honour and humanity, less civilised, in a word, than those whom they claimed the right to enslave in the name of a superiority which they themselves have proved not to exist; and, unless they can establish that their errors, perfidies and cruelties, which can no longer be denied, should

be imputed only to those masters, then they themselves must bear the pitiless weight. I do not know how they will escape from this predicament, nor what the future will decide, that future which is wiser than the past, even as, in the words of an old Slav proverb, the dawn is wiser than the eve. In the meanwhile, let us copy the prudence of our soldiers, who know what to believe far better than we do.